

ON COMPUTER GAMES MONTHLY

BREATH OF FIRE IV

The Powerpuff Girls: Bad Mojo Jojo

Capcom vs. SNK: Millennium Fight

Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2

Fast Food Tycoon

Counter-Strike

& more!

It's like David Foster Wallace
if he played computer games and
didn't know how to write!!

"my feelings are immeasurable and i

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ABOUT THE WRITERS



FORREST

EDITOR/WRITER
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Creator of "on computer games" who uses a variety of pseudonyms as to not write about himself in the third person directly. As such, he will now be switching to first person: I started writing in Yahoo! role-playing chat rooms in the early 2000s and haven't stopped since. I spend my time playing computer games and writing about them, and I have a passion for music. Instead of dry explanations of gameplay-mechanics and "game good," I try to weave serious-real-life-stuff into my writing by tying it to the themes of the game - to varying degrees of success (usually none).



SAM

GUEST WRITER
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Sam has been playing games since before there was a Playstation, before there was Doom, before there was a Windows operating system. His long perspective has not brought him wisdom, only petty frustration and ennui. He now attempts to teach others the error of his ways. He's got a daytime job, he's doing alright.



TUMAHAB NOGARD

GUEST WRITER
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Tumahab has enjoyed gaming since he first held a Nintendo controller in the early 90's. Personal favorites are RPGs and simulation games. Other hobbies include gardening and cooking.



DIGIVOYAGER

GUEST WRITER
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I'm a retro games enthusiast from Pakistan, if you want to chat games or life or whatever I am more than happy to. If you would like to know a little about me I serve as a doctor in the army and shall be doing so for the next decade at the very least then who knows where life will take me. I enjoy reading, anime, retro gaming, nature & photography. Or, simply put, a boring loner. Some games I like: Aconcagua, Brigandine: Grand Edition, Germs: The Targeted Town, Growlanser Generations, and Ogre Battle: The March of the Black Queen!

I write about games sometimes at: wherethefishsleep5.wordpress.com



ROONEY

GUEST WRITER
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I'm a big RPG dork but love to play all sorts of video games, even the quick ones. I'm also trying to learn chess and really bad at it, but always willing to play. I read a lot (postmodern fiction and philosophy, these days) and am working on some larger writing as well. You can find me/chat with me by following some of the links at <https://rooneymcnibnug.omg.lol>



SMOTE_REVERSER

GUEST WRITER
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Not much is known about this mysterious internet wanderer. They seem to guest-write for random internet blogs and then disappear into the digital void shortly thereafter. This publication's attempts to get a fleshed-out biography for Smote were met with pure contrarian vitriol and unbridled rage. Despite having written a quite personal piece on Counter-Strike, they seem to not want any concrete information about themselves on the internet; although, the name and image they chose may reveal something about themselves, but what that 'something' is remains unknown.



Dear Very Imaginary Readers,

This is Forrest, typing to you straight from Retro Arcadia. I am also known as: The Editor, The Boy, The Idiot, or online as buru5; the latter derived from the color, but with butchered spelling resembling poor Japanese-English pronunciation and the number 5 tacked-on at random; an ancient and very-insensitive-inside-joke that is now worn like a scarlet letter of bygone days when ridiculing how people talk was peak humor, or: being seventeen-years-old and stupid.

But enough about me; welcome aboard the Pequod, or: the first issue of On Computer Games Monthly. The name "Pequod" feels appropriate here as this magazine has been an obsession of mine since at least sixty moons ago, much to the detriment of my wife and children who have allowed me to build an office-shed in the backyard to contain the clickity-clacking of my absurdly-loud-and-very-mechanical keyboard. But here I am, getting off track again.


Within the wistful pages of On Computer Games Monthly, you will find articles covering computer games released during a specific month and year of the standard Gregorian calendar; be warned, however, as you may find the occasional article that breaks this rule. Outside of my own writing, every issue of On Computer Games Monthly features guest writers of kindred spirit sourced from all corners of the internet; and, in this way, On Computer Games Monthly is a collaborative writing effort - a digital collective of people who take computer games way too seriously.

A core tenet of On Computer Games is that gaming, like most things in this heinous world, is a subjective experience, and even the most poorly 'reviewed' game can produce intense feelings of joy and nostalgia and make you think real hard about serious-real-life-stuff. Likewise, a critically acclaimed "masterpiece" can make you scream in rage and walk into oncoming traffic on purpose. At On Computer Games, we strive to capture this subjective quality of gaming, and as such, you won't find traditional reviews here - this is not Game Informer - instead, you will find stories about: wanting to kill your friends, hunting, karate belt tests, nuclear bombs, religious dogma, and the pond behind grandma's old house. Some articles may offend you, some may resonate with you, some may make you cringe; regardless: it all comes from the heart.

I believe that mixing money with art is a surefire way to dilute the artwork; once money is exchanged, the art suffers and, inevitably, money becomes more important than the art itself. As such, On Computer Games will never beg, paywall, or accept money from anyone ever. We are self-funded forever; some may think this is a noble pursuit, others may think it's proactive deflection of the fact that my writing is not good enough to warrant making money to begin with - and, as with most things, the truth lies somewhere in the middle.

If any of this resonates with you and you would like to contribute to a future issue of this publication or advertise one of your own passion projects within these pages or just want to chat, please reach out to me directly on Mastodon @buru5@mstdn.games or through email at f0rrest@protonmail.com.

But without further ado: computer games, or something.



ON POP MUSIC

ONPOPMUSIC.COM

"on pop music" is something akin to an album review blog, in which the writers collect their thoughts on music and put them to (digital) paper. some articles will be simple opinion pieces ('reviews,' like something you would find on Allmusic but without the scoring bits as scoring is not sufficient in capturing the *largely* subjective experience of Listening to Music); other articles weave creative writing bits into something resembling a narrative relating to the album being discussed.

"OK WRITING BUT I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY THEY KEEP SHITTING ON REM?" - COLBYJ243

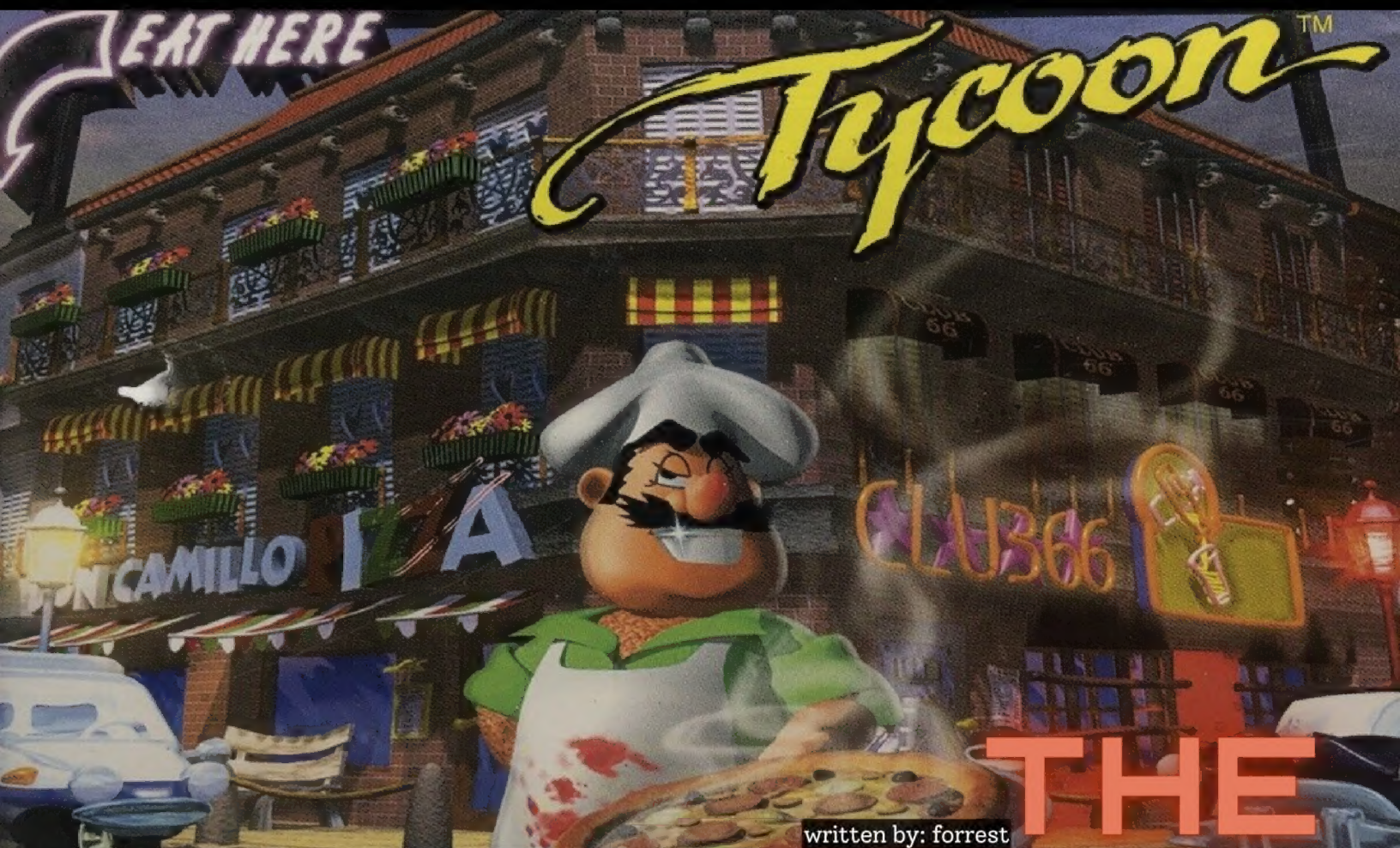
"I FUCKIN LUV THIS."
- BAD-MYSTERIOUS

"NICE ARTICLES."
- REASONABLECOST5934

"COOL STUFF BUT THEY HAVEN'T RELEASED A NEW ARTICLE IN MONTHS - MAYBE YEARS?"
- FANTANOFAN7

"WRITTEN BY THE SAME PRETENTIOUS ASSHOLE THAT DOES ONCOMPUTER.GAMES IF THAT TELLS YOU ANYTHING." - REMFAN76

"ROCK JOURNALISM IS PEOPLE WHO CAN'T WRITE INTERVIEWING PEOPLE WHO CAN'T TALK FOR PEOPLE WHO CAN'T READ." - FRANK ZAPPA



written by: forrest

THE GREAT PIZZA WARS

Behold: a tubby nine-year-old boy obsessed with computer games and cheese pizza; absentminded, shy, and prone to angry outbursts; selfish, hyperactive, and if he didn't find immediate joy in a task – he didn't do that task. He would skip homework because “my dog ate it!” and couldn't be bothered to come up with a more original excuse because The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time and Transformers cartoons lived eternal in his mind. These antisocial proclivities landed The Boy in “special education” classes, but the more The Boy was treated as “special,” the worse his behavior became, and he retreated ever deeper into computer games.

The Boy's Mom didn't know what to do with him. She noticed The Boy's digital obsessions and that they were violent; after all, Zelda featured a young boy that slayed monsters with swords. The Mom thought that if she replaced the violence with educational games that this would not only improve The Boy's behavior – turning him boastworthy for soccer-mom-water-cooler-confab – but also show that she cared about his interests, because above all else: she truly loved her son.

The Mom took The Boy to the local electronics store and told him to pick two computer games from the educational section. It was the year 2000 and stores were packed with computer games containing the prefix “Sim” and the suffix “Tycoon”; these morphemical games were baby's-first-capitalism; business simulators wrapped in graphical-interfaces targeted toward children. The Boy immediately gravitated to the vibrant theme park packaging of RollerCoaster Tycoon. He quickly dismissed the dated graphics of DinoPark Tycoon. SimCity 3000 was also considered but it intimidated The Boy with its technicalities. And just when The Boy was about to call-it-quits, he noticed a glimmering jewel calling out to him from the discount pile. The jewel was an Italian caricature sporting a floppy chef's hat and a white apron stained with what was hopefully pizza sauce; he sported a mustache even more extravagant than Freddie Mercury's during the recording of Queen's 1980 album “The Game” and was grinning into the camera while holding a pizza-with-the-works as if breaking the fourth wall to summon The Boy into a universe of freshly cooked pizza pies forever. Not only was pizza The Boy's favorite food, but Queen was also his favorite band – and by this logic: Fast Food Tycoon was bound to be his favorite game.





After The Boy came home and ate a few slices of pizza for dinner, he slid the pizza-shaped disc into the tray of the Windows 98 computer in Dad's office and clicked through the many prompts of the installer. Upon boot, the words "Fast Food Tycoon, Eat Here" flashed in cold cathode above a seedy street corner that was positioned between a club and a pizza joint; the club was red carpet, and the pizza joint was a money-laundering scheme; both owned by the same organization. The Boy was about to learn many important life lessons.

Fast Food Tycoon - or Pizza Syndicate, as it's known in Europe - is a business simulator centered around managing your own pizza franchise, created by the German developer Software 2000 and published by Activision in North America in November 2000. When the game starts, you are given the option to make your own pizza person, choosing their picture from a premade selection of Italian caricatures, selecting their name, and adjusting their starting stats from a long list that rivals the most complicated of role-playing computer games. Once your character is created, you are thrown into the sleazy world of pizza and quickly realize that you are smack-dab in the middle of an all-out pizza war between ancient crime families. And there's no hope of survival unless you sell your soul to the mafia for better ingredients, better pizza, and guaranteed protection from getting whacked by Papa John. Once you become a made man in the dark underworld of pizza, you crawl your way up the pizza chain from Chuck E. Cheese Capo to Don of Domino's and, if you're lucky, to The Godfather of Pizza.

Fast Food Tycoon is as much about making the tastiest pizza as it is about sending armed goombahs to rival pizza joints; bursting with such depth as "goths like meat on their pizza" to "should I poison the food at Mario's Pizza Palace or should I just plant a bomb instead?" to "which style of music should I play to attract the correct demographic?" to "should I bribe the mayor or just save the money for more machine guns?" All the while fudging numbers and trying to make the perfect pizza pies only to perpetuate The Great Pizza Wars - an endless cycle of pizza-funded violence.





PIZZA IS VERY SERIOUS BUSINESS

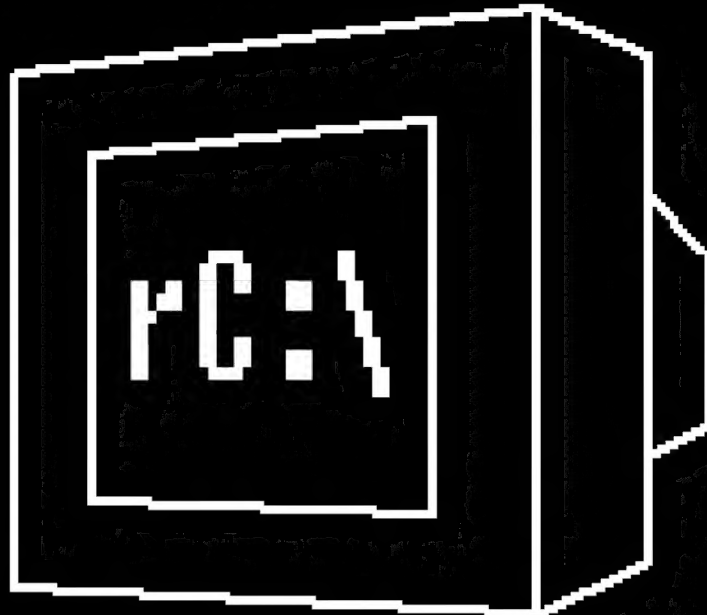
written by: forrest

Fast Food Tycoon teaches children many valuable lessons about the stygian horrors of not only pizza but also business and humanity as a whole. It teaches children that bribing the mayor has massive perks in the form of blind-eyes and tax-exemptions. It teaches that if you plant rats in a restaurant, the Department of Public Health will shut down that restaurant. It teaches that pizza joints are a surprisingly efficient way to launder stolen bank money. It teaches that fear is one of our most powerful motivators. And above all else, it teaches that pizza is very serious business.

Of course, The Mom had no clue that Fast Food Tycoon bestowed these valuable life lessons upon The Boy. To her, Fast Food Tycoon was just another educational business game for her son to level up his business acumen and help on his path to becoming a fitter, happier, and more productive human being. When she watched The Boy play, he was simply managing ledgers and decorating restaurants and there was nothing to be concerned about. The Mom was so impressed by Fast Food Tycoon's ability to engage The Boy that she recommended her neighbors buy the game for their children, and thus, the ancient cycle of pizza violence continues to this day - The Great Pizza Wars rage on.

When The Boy looked back, he realized that Fast Food Tycoon was not prescriptive; instead, it was a warning - a commentary on the dangers of unregulated capitalism, the prominence of quid pro quo in the private and public sectors, and that, while fear and violence may rule humanity, the golden rule always kicks in and you will eventually reap what you sow; be that in the form of delicious pizza pies or a bag over your head in Papa John's basement.





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WINNERS & LOSERS

written by: Sam (aka: Crapknocker)

I'm playing Tony Hawk Pro Skater 2 on my Dreamcast, working a shitty waiter job, drifting semi-aimlessly after college in a basement apartment that occasionally gets leaks from the toilet from the next floor up. The Dreamcast as a platform is dead and all of its games are currently marked down to make room for other, more popular titles; both of us are a pair of losers, at a low point in our lives.

Tony Hawk Pro Skater 2, however, is the best skating game ever made. No other game in its genre has ever won as much critical or popular acclaim. The game was available on Dreamcast, Playstation 2, Xbox, N64, Game Boy Color, Game Boy Advance, Mac, PC, and Windows Phone. It won a Bafta for Best Console Game, won Electronic Gaming Monthly's 2000 Game of the Year, and a Kid's Choice Award for Favorite Video Game. No game in the genre since has reached such heights.

In my day job, I regularly get verbally abused by my boss, the owner of the restaurant, as do the rest of the employees. I hear the n-word being used frequently by the higher-ups. I fail to make friends with the other wait staff. I make more money setting up the salad bar in the mornings at minimum wage than I do in tips for the rest of the shift because I am a shitty waiter.

The Dreamcast came along in 1999, debuting shortly before the PlayStation 2. While there were a handful of titles like Tony Hawk Pro Skater 2 that came out on both systems, due to rampant piracy on the Dreamcast and the fact that it was not able to play DVDs, the PlayStation quickly pulled ahead in the console race. The DC would be discontinued from production only 6 months after the release of Tony Hawk Pro Skater 2, losing that generation's console race.

After finishing another shift at the restaurant, I head back to my one-room basement apartment. I can see the lights from the neighboring rooms through the cracks between the walls and foundation because they aren't fully sealed. I walk past the broken sink in the communal bathroom to pee. I go to my tiny room and wonder what the first step should be in getting out of this dingy, poorly-kept-up place. My thoughts are interrupted by the sounds of my next-door-neighbors having sex.

WINNERS & LOSERS

"NO ONE HAS YET COME UP WITH A MORE FUN WAY TO TRANSLATE SKATEBOARDING INTO COMPUTER GAME FORMAT."

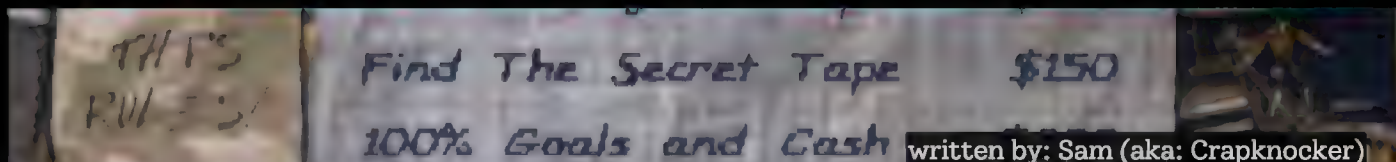
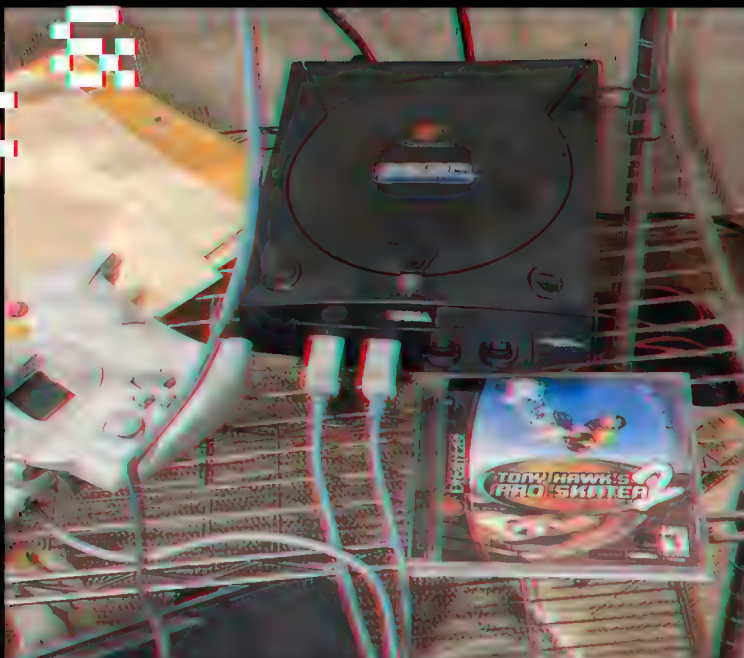
Later games in the Pro Skater series added more mechanics to the general formula, including new ways to keep your combo going and being able to get off your board. As time went on, the series played with open worlds, wacky guest stars (Underground 2) and other more gimmicky conceits. The core gameplay remained mostly the same throughout the series. While games afterwards tried different formats and core gameplay mechanics such as Skate, no one has yet come up with a more fun way to translate skateboarding into computer game format.

Thanks to a rather tenuous internet connection I set up by squeezing cables through the cracks between the walls, I manage to download and burn games for the Dreamcast. Despairing of my lack of initiative, my significant other convinces me to start applying to graduate schools. To take the next step in life and in my career, I begin the slow process of turning things around. I use the meager funds from my tips to purchase Dreamcast games from the mall at liquidation prices. Much later, these games would end up being worth hundreds of dollars.

As my year after college went on, I ended up applying to graduate schools in an attempt to move on with my life. I received a full ride to one school and ended up failing out after little more than a year. A year or two after that I would be admitted to another graduate program which would flame out disastrously after the budget of the entire department was cut. I left without the degree I wanted, but I gained skills, contacts, and career prospects. Over the years, I managed to build a good life for myself. I got married. Goals I'd had since I was a child that then seemed impossible end up getting accomplished. My life hit a winning streak.

The Dreamcast has, in recent years, undergone a critical reappraisal. There have been new games announced in core DC franchises like Jet Set Radio and Crazy Taxi. Prices for games for the system have reached all-time highs. Emulators for the system bring increased visibility to the library of games that call the Dreamcast home. Homebrew releases bring new games decades after the market abandoned the DC for its newer brethren. The core group of Dreamcast fans have supported the console in the years after the console's demise and the exit of Sega from the hardware market. In the years since Tony Hawk Pro Skater 2's release, it's been re-released at least twice to rave reviews.

OVER A LONG ENOUGH TIME PERIOD, WINNERS BECOME LOSERS AND LOSERS BECOME WINNERS. FORTUNES REVERSE AND INTERTWINE. GAMES AND LIVES GET REMADE.



ODE TO THE Dreamcast



There was a high-rise condominium, with a pool on the ground floor, and a Boy half-out-of-water playing with toys on the concrete edge of summer; Sonic ran on water, Mega Man sank in water, and Goku didn't get involved unless there was a serious threat to Waterworld. There was a stepfather casting long shadows and cold cash on his new family. Neon down the block flashed "delicious shakes here at Johnny Rockets." And up the elevator was a bedroom with an extravagant bed bedight with decorative pillows bound for the floor by bedtime; out of place by the cathode-ray tube was the Sega Dreamcast. The year was Y2K – one year before they paved paradise and put up a mini-mall.

The Boy would boot up Phantasy Star Online first; the anime artwork appealed to The Boy's Toonami-brain. He wanted so badly to love this game but would always switch to a different title after being mercilessly slain by Goboomas. The controls were too tanky, and it seemed like the levels were tuned for multiplayer, but there was no split-screen, and he didn't realize it was an online game because he thought the word "online" in the title was just a cool stylization and online games on consoles weren't even a thing back then and he didn't have any friends to play with anyway.

The Boy would swap in the Spider-Man disc and proceed to web-up the clouds above blocky-skyscrapers in cities with very-low draw-distance; swinging from cloud to cloud with faux-avian-splendor; and he loved it, and he loved it even more when he unlocked the black Spider-Man suit. When the webs ran out and the boredom set in, he switched to Sonic Adventure; it was glitchy as hell with loop-de-loops and falling-through-maps, but he stuck around for the Chao garden and the whales and the tease of eventually unlocking Super Sonic.

And then it was gone. The Boy's parents moved out of that high-rise condominium – it was sold to a real-estate mogul who turned it into a mini-mall – and the pool dried up from loneliness. The Dreamcast was lost in the move. By 2001, the Dreamcast wasn't just lost for The Boy – it was lost for everyone; the Dreamcast was discontinued worldwide on March 31, 2001.

Don't it always seem to go – you don't know what you've got 'til it's gone.

written by: forrest

ONCOMPUTER.GAMES

"#Dreamcast had the greatest racing game of all time, #SpeedDevils. I still have my Dreamcast in my media set up to this day so I can spin that up once in a while."

- Pepperbar @pepperbar@fandom.ink

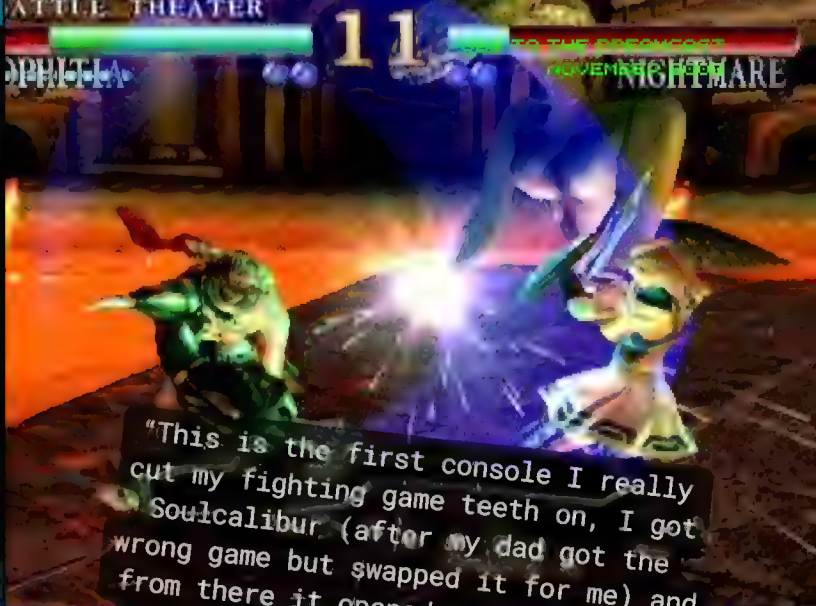
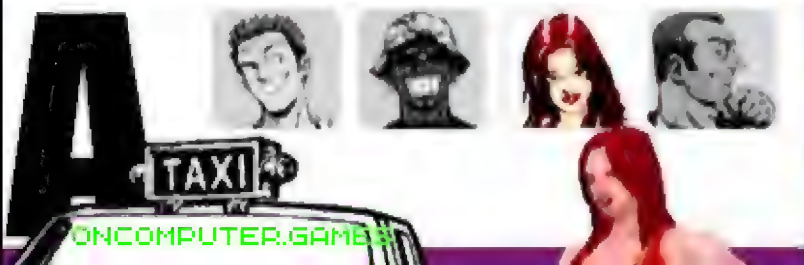
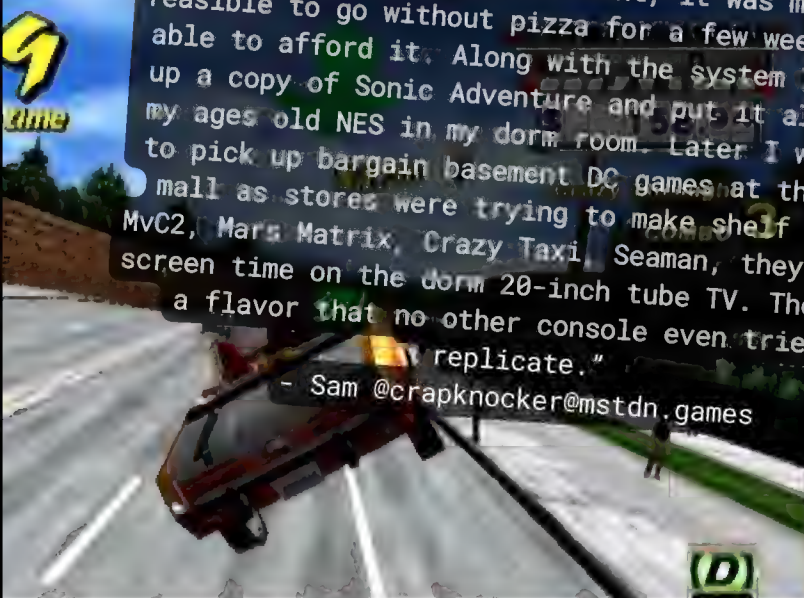


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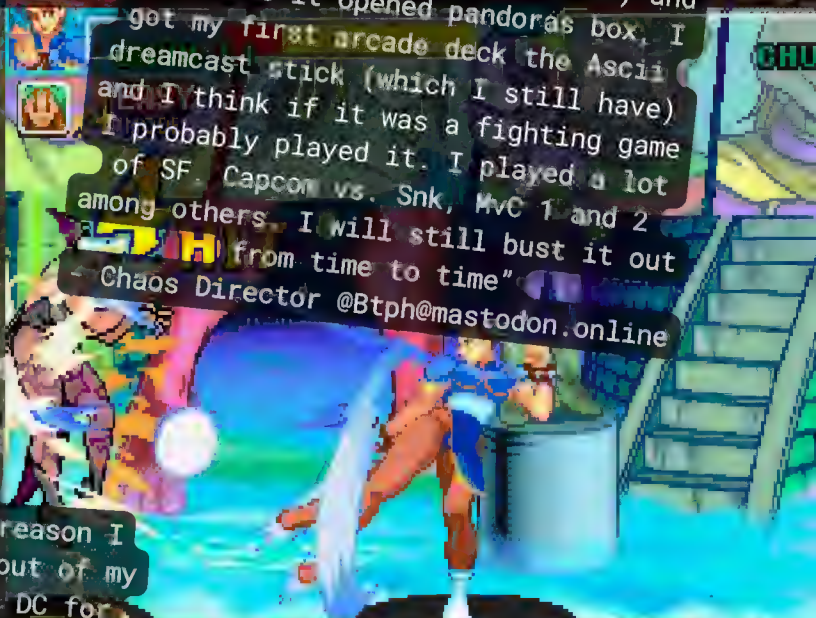
"My DC story is one of poverty. The only reason I got one was that the PS2 was unbelievably out of my price range and I was able to find a used DC for \$50. As a broke college student, it was much more feasible to go without pizza for a few weeks to be able to afford it. Along with the system I picked up a copy of Sonic Adventure and put it alongside my ages old NES in my dorm room. Later I was able to pick up bargain basement DC games at the local mall as stores were trying to make shelf space. MvC2, Mars Matrix, Crazy Taxi, Seaman, they all got screen time on the dorm 20-inch tube TV. The DC had a flavor that no other console even tried to replicate."

- Sam @crapknocker@mstdn.games



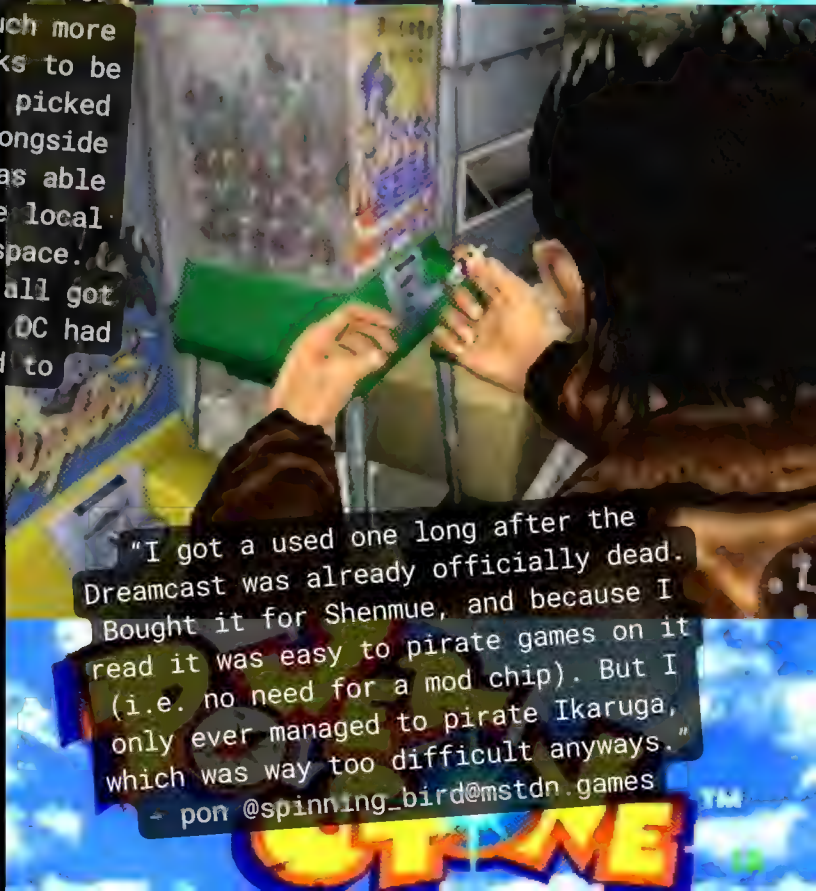
"This is the first console I really cut my fighting game teeth on, I got Soulcalibur (after my dad got the wrong game but swapped it for me) and from there it opened pandora's box. I got my first arcade deck the ASCII dreamcast stick (which I still have) and I think if it was a fighting game I probably played it. I played a lot of SF, Capcom vs. Snk, MvC 1 and 2 among others. I will still bust it out from time to time"

- Chaos Director @Btph@mastodon.online



"I got a used one long after the Dreamcast was already officially dead. Bought it for Shenmue, and because I read it was easy to pirate games on it (i.e. no need for a mod chip). But I only ever managed to pirate Ikaruga, which was way too difficult anyways."

- pon @spinning_bird@mstdn.games



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QUARTER CIRCLE MELTDOWN

written by: forrest



"I MUST HAVE SMOKED HALF-A-PACK OF CIGARETTES BECAUSE I WAS GETTING MY ASS HANDED TO ME ON A VERY DIRTY ASHTRAY."

I remember it as if it were last night. My cat – a strapping lad of gray shorthair named Digit – jumped through the open ground-floor apartment window onto my lap while I was sitting on the couch playing computer games with my roommate. The window was open not only to allow Digit free passage outside but also to filter the tobacco smoke that stained our lungs and jaundiced the light-colored walls. My roommate and I had Dreamcast controllers in hand and lit cigarettes dangling from our mouths and subtle glowers on our faces as we sat brand-new-to-adulthood and transfixed by the massive widescreen firing off psychedelic lightshows. The blues of hadoukens and the purples of reppukens flashed about inside puffs of cigarette smoke like ball lightning within the clouds of an alien planet. And although the room was loud, there was silence between us, for we were engaged in the digital-equivalent of a samurai honor duel and we were both great pretenders; pretending like we were engaged in just another friendly game of *Capcom vs. SNK: Millennium Fight 2000* for the Sega Dreamcast; when, in reality, there was an intense clash of personalities playing out between the sounds of button mashing and pixelated fighters yelling the names of their ridiculous special-attacks and Satoshi Ise's electro-infused drum-and-bass stage music.

Capcom vs. SNK: Millennium Fight 2000 was originally developed and released by Capcom in August 2000 for the arcades; it was later released on Dreamcast in North America on November 8th, 2000. The origin story – the myth – is that the magazine *Arcadia* featured a cover with both *The King of Fighters '98* and *Street Fighter Alpha 3* titles a little too close together and readers misread this thinking it was "KOF vs. SF"; when this imaginary game didn't manifest, fans of both series went unhinged with hate mail and thus: *Capcom vs. SNK* was born – or something. And while it wasn't the first crossover between Capcom and SNK, it was the first to reach a wide audience outside of Japan, as the previous title – *SNK vs. Capcom: The Match of the Millennium* – was only released for the Neo Geo Pocket Color; a handheld console that was poorly adopted in the West where *Street Fighter* and *Pokemon* infected the minds of young computer-gamers like brain-eating amoebas. An updated version of this game, *Capcom vs. SNK Pro*, was released a year later – and the concept was so popular that it would eventually spawn a sequel, *Capcom vs. SNK 2*, which built upon the hip-hop back-alley beat-down eclecticism of *Millennium Fight 2000* and further reinforced Capcom and SNK as the premier 2D-fighting game developers.



My roommate and I were on our centesimal round of Capcom vs. SNK: Millennium Fight 2000 and I had not won a single match. I played Iori and Sakura; he played Ken and Yuri. I must have smoked half-a-pack of cigarettes because I was getting my ass handed to me on a very dirty ashtray. I persisted in total silence with a look of unbothered determination on my face; this faux-stoicism belied the fact that I was a raging storm inside. I could have stopped playing; I could have called it quits after the nth loss; but something like pride compelled me to keep going, and as I kept going, my playing got worse and the hole grew deeper until it was quickly approaching Hell. My roommate's faux-stoicism was much simpler; with every knock-out: his confidence grew and his gamer-cred multiplied, and he would always have this over me because computer games were very serious back then and he dared not speak a word lest the fisticuffs escape the television-set and stain the shag carpet with blood. The digital-equivalent of the samurai honor duel was about to end in seppuku.



Capcom vs. SNK was revolutionary as it combined characters from rival developers and introduced the lesser-known SNK fighting games to a wider western audience initially put off by SNK's realistic-yet-very-anime art style, especially when compared to Capcom's more western-palatable cartoon-like aesthetics. Both art styles exist in this game, with characters drawn in either style depending on which "groove" was selected before character-selection. The crossover makes perfect sense as SNK's fighting games were directly inspired by Capcom; SNK's Fatal Fury: King of Fighters was designed by Takashi Nishiyama, the director of Street Fighter, and was envisioned as a spiritual successor to that game. The two companies often parodied each other; Dan from Street Fighter, a parody of Ryo from SNK's Art of Fighting, who himself was a homage to Capcom's Ryu. And while Dan may not be in Millennium Fight 2000, the game does include a roster of over 20 characters from each series. As with most 2D fighters, the controls are obtuse to newbies but intuitive to those familiar with the genre; players are encouraged to use an arcade stick or learn to slide their thumb in circles, half circles, and quarter circles on very-small-directional-pads to execute special-attacks. Both series use this input method so there's nothing to learn coming from one or the other; thus, combining Capcom and SNK characters into a single game was a no-brainer.

Patience and practice of the key fundamentals are important with all 2D-fighting games and this is especially true for *Capcom vs. SNK: Millennium Fight 2000*; its 4-button control scheme, lack of true combos, and smaller skill list compared to the series it pulled from, make mastering the key fundamentals – footsies, blocking, looking for openings, and punishing – extremely important. You could master all a character's inputs, learn all their moves and perform them perfectly, but if you didn't time these moves correctly or space them out properly, you would fail every time. For example, Iori Yagami – my main character of choice in most SNK titles – has a super-special-attack called "Ura 108 Shiki: Ya Sakazuki" which can stun and heavily damage the opponent, but it's blockable so throwing it out in a battle without respect to the opponent's actions will result in the opponent blocking the attack and punishing you. In fact, one could bait these types of attacks and punish them with a simple low kick, and entire matches could be won doing this. Even the most fancy quarter-circle-back-half-circle-forward-punch special-attack won't save you if the opponent sees it coming

And that was why I failed to win a single match that dark night on that alien planet. I knew the cool moves but I didn't know how to properly use them. I would fire a burning projectile, but my roommate would jump-kick over it. I would use a rush-down attack but my opponent would only block and punish me with a low-kick. I was bound for the floor. I realized what was happening early on but I couldn't adapt to it because I was too focused on quarter-circle-back and quarter-circle-forward and getting those flashy special-attack kills. My roommate patiently punished every attack with normal punches and kicks while I was performing complicated inputs for cool-points from the gamer gods who never answered my prayers.

Several hours passed in silence. We both had to work in the morning and at a certain point it became too irresponsible to continue getting my ass beat. I said something like, "I have to get some sleep" and my roommate nodded and we went our separate ways without another word between us. We both knew what happened.

When the door closed behind him, only the miasma of angst and an embarrassed man-child were left behind. I stood silently as the *Capcom vs. SNK: Millennium Fight 2000* title screen flashed before my eyes, and my hands were trembling, feeling a wail building up inside me. My failures replayed over and over again in my head; over fifty rounds and no wins; my opponent didn't perform a single special attack but still managed to defeat me. And all my quarter-circle-forwards and half-circle-backs only resulted in a full-blown quarter-circle-meltdown. The Dreamcast controller I was holding dropped to the floor, and I fell to my knees with my face buried in my hands. As I was doing this, my roommate walked in to grab the lighter he left on the couch but, upon seeing my crumpled form, immediately turned around and left the room.

We never played *Capcom vs. SNK* again.





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HERE BE DRAGONS

"I WOULDST CALL THEE FOOLISH. BUT THOU ART MORTAL. THOU CANNOT GO AGAINST THY NATURE, NO MORE THAN A FISH COULD WALKETH UPON THE FIRMAMENT." - FOU-LU

BREATH OF FIRE IV

Eager explorers would find all manner of beasts illustrated on ancient maps - the most common of these beasts were Dragons. "Here Be Dragons," the cartographers of antiquity would say before they inked fire-breathers upon lands that many explored but never returned from. These Dragons served as a warning to esurient explorers who wished to make a name for themselves, and the warning was clear: be careful what you wish for because you just might wake a sleeping Dragon.

The explorers in this story were called They Who Pass.

They Who Pass were like You and I, and they toil and torment amidst their short lives. Their primeval instincts reached for something more, and they sought it out like infants drawn to forbidden doors; magic of fire, water, air, and earth - but these things brought only momentary mirth, for they coveted even more; and through their toil and torment, they found They Who Endure.

THE ENDLESS

They Who Endure were Endless and Dragon and Godlike, and in their realm they took weird form and played like summer children without a care in their cosmic voids. But the mortals became proud and esurient, and in their insatiable-wanting they spun dark rituals to pluck the Endless from their places of old. But the mortals' profane incantations were flawed, and in their enochian attempt to summon the Yorae Dragon - the mightiest of all Endless - they sundered the Dragon God in twain and voided his halves through time and space.

The first-half was named Fou-Lu - Yin to Yang. He was incomplete, but his power was immeasurable. Fou-Lu took the form of a snowy-haired youth. He had a cold emerald gaze and he draped himself in royal colors. He was stoic and determined with a quietus in his wake that beget respect from all around him. Fou-Lu was loved and feared by all.

The second-half was named Ryu - Yang to Yin. He was incomplete and six-hundred-years late. Ryu was weak but bursting with potential; a blank slate. Ryu took the form of an ocean-haired youth. He had a gaze like the clear waters on a secret beach and he draped himself in the garb of the everyman. He was buoyant, boundless and spread hope to all those around him. Ryu was loved and revered by all.

During Fou-Lu's time, the mortal tribes waged perpetual war through magic and steel. The sensible ones prayed to Fou-Lu to bring about a world with no suffering - a utopia. Fou-Lu heard their pleas and, through his great power and charisma, forged the violent tribes into an Empire.

Thus, Fou-Lu became the First Emperor of the Fou Empire. And he made a promise of peace to his people, and his people made the same promise back to him.

However, the unification was a strain on Fou-Lu, for he was incomplete. Drained, Fou-Lu fell into a deep slumber; if at first he dreamt of utopia, his dreams soon piped into chaos; as the mortals, without Fou-Lu's guidance, slowly returned to their wicked ways, and this darkness crept into Fou-Lu's hibernation, hexing the sleeping god's slumber.

They Who Pass became proud and esurient once more - or maybe they always were?

written by: forrest



INTERLUDE/SWAN SONG

"MY FEELINGS FOR BREATH OF FIRE IV SPAN OVER A DECADE AND CANNOT BE CONTAINED WITHIN A WIKIPEDIA ARTICLE OR EVEN THE WORDS YOU ARE READING NOW
— MY FEELINGS ARE IMMEASURABLE AND TIMELESS."

If you made it past all the amateur, cringe-inducing attempts at prose-poetry, then – other than deserving praise – you are giving me far too much credit as a writer and should probably stop before disappointment sets in. But if you insist on this folly, I want to take this interlude to talk about my history with Breath of Fire IV and discuss some of its more literal aspects.

This is the part where – if you played Breath of Fire IV – I will now be confirming your personal biases or shattering them to the point where you send us a letter like, “well, actually, Breath of Fire combat is completely different from Dragon Quest because you get to pick who attacks first and also the BGM you said that uses a sitar actually uses a tanpura,” while never engaging with the real meat of the essay – and to those readers: I thank you for keeping me on-point with my fact-checking game.

It would be easy to say that the Breath of Fire series is Capcom's answer to Final Fantasy or Dragon Quest, and in many ways that is not entirely incorrect. Each game features turn-based combat and a diverse cast of unique characters ranging from anthropomorphic animals to angst-ridden teenagers and they all take place in whimsical fantasy realms full of swords-and-sorcery and sometimes-science-fiction; and, most importantly, they are all role-playing games made by Japanese developers. The Breath of Fire series, however, showed up late to the party; it took six years to manifest after the original Final Fantasy in 1987, which itself was inspired by Dragon Quest, both of which firmly cemented the role-playing genre into the cultural milieu of Japan and, eventually, the world. But, to be honest with all zero of our readers, I have moved beyond caring about reciting historical facts about stuff-and-things; not only does it feel wikipedical, but it also feels fraudulent; I wasn't there so the best I can do is pretend to know things based on hand-me-downs and telephone-games. Instead, I prefer to focus on what a psychologist may be asking me in ten years' time, that being: "... and how does that make you feel?" And my feelings for Breath of Fire IV span over a decade and cannot be contained within a Wikipedia article or even the words you are reading now – my feelings are immeasurable and timeless.

When I first played Breath of Fire IV, I was in a very weird place. I lived in a rented apartment with two other people, one of whom was my ex-girlfriend, and the other was my best friend. I was addicted to prescription Adderall and worked until midnight at a call center. I would get home from troubleshooting cheap coffee makers, pop some amphetamine salts, and play computer games while listening to shoegaze music until I got tired – and getting-tired was hard to do on the prescription version of very-hard-drugs. All the while I would smoke half a pack of cigarettes in the house thus staining the walls yellow with nicotine and angst.

During this time: best friends turned to enemies and girlfriends to ex-girlfriends and clean homes to dumpy homes and happy children to failed adults and this-rules to this-fucking-sucks and Yin to Yang and debit cards to overdraft fees. We retreated into our rooms and listened for footsteps outside the door so that we could time our bathroom-and-kitchen-excursions perfectly as to avoid crossing paths because we lived together for too long and our quirks were just too much. We were also on drugs and perpetually fucked up. It was always “why don't you take out the trash?” and “why don't you clean your room?” and “stop punching holes in the walls” and “your dog shit in the living room again” and “you owe me three months' rent” and “why did you kick my door down?” and “clean the dishes after you make dinner” and “why didn't you tell me your toilet was leaking?” and “why do we suddenly owe the water company two thousand dollars?” and “stop having loud sex with your boyfriend in the living room.” We moved out of our parents' homes too quickly and the universe tried its damndest to make us responsible adults, but like fitting the big triangle-piece into the eye socket of a rigored corpse, it was not happening and we continued to decay and maggots were starting to show up.

If the experience taught me anything, it was that you should never rent an apartment with your best friend, and you should certainly never ever rent an apartment with a girl who cheated on you twice but promised that they were a “changed person and it was just a weird time in my life and I will never ever do it again and I love you so much baby.”

NEVEREVER

ONCOMPUTER.GAMES

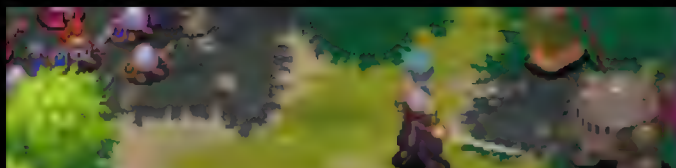


INTERLUDE SWAN SONG

"A BEAUTIFUL NIGHTMARE GAME"

During this epoch of weirdness, I decided to play Breath of Fire IV - which had been gifted to me by an old high school acquaintance. The jewel case glistened like a ray of hope amongst the grime of the apartment and I was instantly transfixed. Looking back, I wasn't sure if it was the Adderall or the chronic or the game itself or all-of-the-above - but, all those years ago, it seemed like Breath of Fire IV was the best game I had ever played. I needed to be sure so I booted up Breath of Fire IV in the here-and-now and quickly discovered that I had to be married to the wind and the rain and the dark to fully appreciate this beautiful heart attack of a computer game - and it just so happened that my thirty-third anniversary to the wind and the rain and the dark was just around the corner.

Breath of Fire IV is a blend of three-dimensional environments and two-dimensional sprites that should not work together yet fit together like Yin and Yang to create a diorama-effect that is both beautiful and haunting; this beauty belies a hidden darkness, highlighted by the three-sixty camera that lends itself to secrets-around-every-corner. The sprites within this diorama are hand-drawn and shaded to perfection by those whose only philosophy in life is pure-pixel-poetry. And the animation, lo! - the animation; the characters move with such elegant wind-up and execution that every input has a hair-raising excitement baked-in that never gets stale - both in and out of battle. The music, a heroic mix of Western-influenced string and wind instruments, Eastern-tinged drum-and-bass with sitar and chanting, and jazz billowing with bells and breeze, places Breath of Fire IV firmly between SaGa Frontier 2 and Final Fantasy VIII in terms of Greatest Computer Game Soundtracks Ever Made. The disparate elements of Breath of Fire IV combine into a computer game so spellbinding that one would be forgiven for thinking that some sort of Ancient Computer Game God crafted it from pure dreamstuff and raw thunderbolts.



But the Gods skimmed on the actual gameplay, as Breath of Fire IV does little to expand on the standard turn-based combat of its contemporaries besides turning every character into a monster-magic-learning Blue Mage and incorporating a turn-management style that allows any party member to attack in any order on any turn. And although complete with fancy combo attacks and flashy Dragon cutscenes, Breath of Fire IV combat still feels too close to the simplicity of Dragon Quest to provide significant strategic depth. Furthermore, the inclusion of repetitive mini-games undermines some of the game's more exciting moments - especially when those mini-games determine the strength of your main character's Dragon forms; a game design decision that only seems like a good idea after consecutive head bonks and morphine treatment.

But Worry not, dear zero-readers, for the aforementioned gripes are minor, as gameplay - like life - is what you make of it, and besides: Breath of Fire IV has the best fishing mini-game of any Japanese role-playing game ever.



Breath of Fire IV is a devastatingly beautiful nightmare game that is a bit repetitive in the best ways possible but also beyond words and, being released two months after the death of the PlayStation, is truly a swan song for both the console and my leaving a really bad situation whilst being over two thousand dollars in debt to the Brunswick Water and Sewer Commission.

THE HEX

"A WEAPON SO POWERFUL... THAT SIMPLY USING IT DOST PLACE THEM IN JEOPARDY? VERILY... THEIR FOLLY IS GREATER THAN EVEN I HADST THOUGHT." - FOU-LU

The Fou Empire, without its founder, deteriorated into violent psychosis - or what might be called: the normal human condition.

Those Who Pass believed that they knew the slumbering god's secrets and bickered endlessly on minutia until one man took up a sword and declared himself the next Emperor of the Fou Empire. Through jingoism and jazz, the second Emperor of the Fou Empire came to power, and then the third, and so on; with each succession, the Fou Empire fell further from Fou-Lu's utopian ideal. Soniel - the 13th Emperor of the Fou Empire - was an esurient, cowardly man who cared only for his own desires; he launched many efforts to conquer the nations of the Eastern continent: Wyndia, Ludia, and Worrent. To this end, he assembled a sinister team of sorcerers and scientists to develop the most nightmarish weapon ever devised: The Carronade, a gigantic cannon erected in the middle of the vibrant city of Astana; Astana was second only to the capital city of Chedo in terms of beauty; but Astana's beauty belied an ugliness underneath its foundation - the bloodstained torture chambers of the Carronade; run by wicked geneticist Yuna - The Carronade was powered by people; the emotional suffering and psychic torment of real, fleshy people. The Carronade fired a malefic Hex from the accumulated psychic torment of its sacrificial lambs. The Hex not only caused immediate destruction but also left a fallout of extrasensory terror radiating outward for miles from the blast zone. Like Nuclear Yinyang without the Yin or the Yang and only the godawful smell of human flesh and screaming.

THE HEX

"A HEX IS FORMED FROM THE NEGATIVE THOUGHTS AND EMOTIONS OF THE SACRIFICE ... WE TORTURE THE SACRIFICE IN THE MOST PAINFUL WAYS POSSIBLE." — YUNA

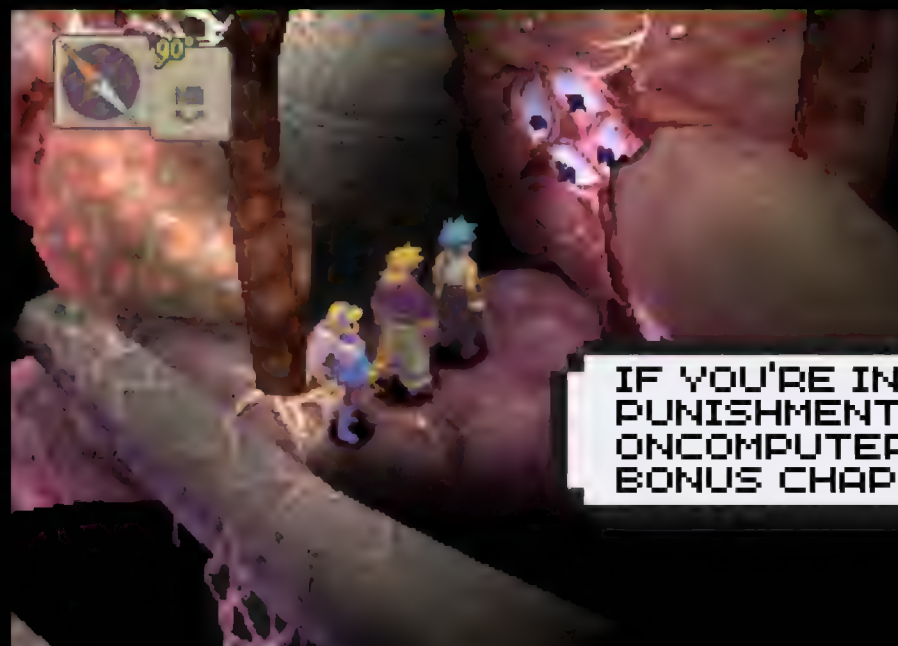
The Fou Empire made liberal use of the Carronade against their enemies, and the Eastern nations rallied together against this terrible weapon, but the Carronade was too powerful and the Eastern nations had no choice but to declare a ceasefire as they negotiated terms of surrender with the Hexers.

However, the Fou Empire had a problem; the Carronade's ammunition — the human meat — was fragile and perished easily; but what if the sacrifice was like the Endless — what if the ammunition was immortal?

Yuna had already considered this problem and was toiling away on a solution; he formulated a way to create his own Endless. But much like the summoning of the Yorae Dragon: the ritual was flawed and required a person with great resolve and an intense emotional connection to the Fou Empire's greatest enemies.

Thus, Princess Elina of Wyndia was chosen as the guinea pig for this terrible experiment.

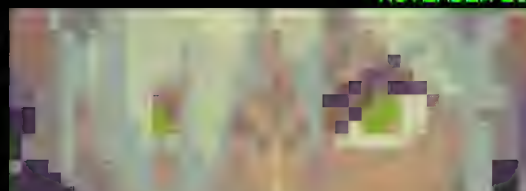
HER LOVE WOULD BECOME A NUCLEAR BOMB



IF YOU'RE INTO SELF-PUNISHMENT: NAVIGATE TO ONCOMPUTER.GAMES FOR A BONUS CHAPTER!

Princess Elina was kidnapped and forced into the bowels of Astana's bloody underworld. She was taken beyond the torture chamber, through the sewers, and into Yuna's laboratory. And she was violated. Princess Elina writhed in pain as her body was mutilated through surgery and sorcery. Her body changed in profound ways. Her organs grew so large that they burst from her stomach. She gained the guts of giants without the skin to contain them. Her guts grew so quickly that she was placed in a bed with a hole extending into the sewers, allowing her intestinal kudzu to slop through the hole and grow unfettered. She turned the sewers into an ocean of blood and pus crashing about like the waves of some heinous storm.

Yuna succeeded in creating his own Dragon, but he did not heed the cartographer's warning now the real Dragons were coming.



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NUCLEAR YINYANG

"THOU SAVEST THOU WERT WAITING FOR US? THOU KNOWEST OF US AND WHAT WE ARE THEN? ... AND KNOWING THIS, THOU WOULDST GREET US WITH MALICE IN THINE HEART AND THINE BLADE IN HAND?" - FOU-LU

THE AWAKENING

Six-hundred years later, a Dragon descended into a dark world by way of a bright star. And when the fire died and the dust settled, there was only The Boy. In some versions of the story, The Boy was named Ryu - in others, The Boy was Yang, but in all versions: The Boy was You. He stood tabula rasa with his junk hanging out. And there was a smile on his face that said "everything is going to be alright" without saying anything at all; for he was mute and his actions spoke louder than words.

The Boy's naivety found him tagalong with a band of mortals searching for a missing friend. He witnessed the horrors of the Hex; the endless bloodshed of war; and all the suffering mortals inflicted upon each other for sport. He witnessed the tears of parents when their children perished from the Hex. He witnessed innocence and love and Yin and Yang and then he witnessed it all snuffed out. Most importantly, he witnessed moments of fleeting joy and these moments were made all the more precious by their very transience.

Clary-sage, daylily, and sundrop - they burst and bloom and then they're gone. And there is beauty in this. But one thing stood out to The Boy - the greed of only a handful of powerful people was all it took to fire a Hex into a playground or turn a princess into pandemonium. Children died in distant crossfire while those responsible turned a blind-eye and this upset The Boy. But what should be done about those who crush the flowers underneath their heels? He did not know the answer, and so, he sought out his other half.

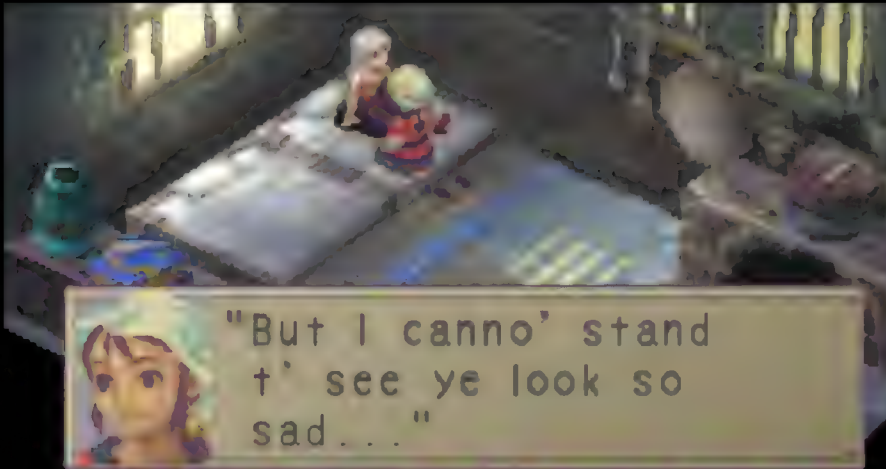
The Boy's other half had just woke from a six-hundred-year slumber.

Fou-Lu intended to merge with his other half and take his place, once again, on the throne of the Fou Empire. The promise would be fulfilled - forever. To this end, Fou-Lu set his sights on the capital city of Chedo - there, he would take his place as God Emperor once more while he awaited The Boy.

Fou-Lu expected a festival in his honor but what he found was another awakening - a wizard and a legion of soldiers greeted him with malice in their hearts and blades in their hands. Mortals who propped themselves up as Gods while claiming that Gods were no longer needed had marked Fou-Lu for death. And during Fou-Lu's slumber, these mortals devised ways to slay the Endless and make their own.

THE MORTALS FORGOT THE PROMISE.





THE AWAKENING

"WHAT IS THIS MALEFIC PRESCENCE!?" - FOU-LU

The wizard was strong, and Fou-Lu was forced to retreat into the skies, but this was anticipated and – summoning a great winged beast – the wizard sent Fou-Lu plummeting into the ground below. Witnessing the crash, a peasant woman named Mami found the injured Fou-Lu and took him into her home. Mami's beauty unfolded like the petals of a tulip and she was as gentle as the spring breeze. Fou-Lu lived with Mami for many moons and they became inseparable. Mami loved all things and, over time, she loved Fou-Lu most of all; when they paired, she was filled with his divine energy. During this time, Fou-Lu tended the fields; worked the hoe, shoveled dirt, and felt the transient joys of mortal life. But, like all things transient: it would not last. A villager – jealous of Mami and Fou-Lu's relationship – informed the Empire of Fou-Lu's location. And soon, the wizard arrived with malice once more. Mami's home was surrounded by soldiers. Mami pleaded to the wizard that she was just a simple farmer but he was no fool and could feel Fou-Lu's divine presence within her.

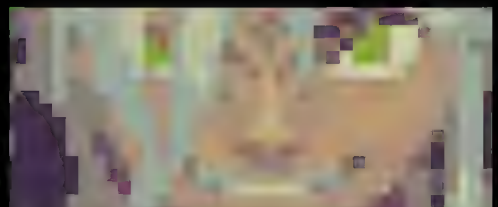
Mami could not stand to see her love harmed, so she barricaded the home and begged Fou-Lu to escape without her. Thus, Fou-Lu was at a crossroads – his lover or the promise? If there was a third option, he did not consider it. The wizard spelled his way through the flimsy barricade and Fou-Lu was gone. The wizard looked down at Mami and – feeling the Dragon energy radiating from her – grinned a wicked grin and said: "this one will make a perfect sacrifice for the Carronade."

HER LOVE WOULD TURN INTO A NUCLEAR BOMB, AND THE TARGET WAS FOU-LU.

Fou-Lu's was resolved to return to Chedo and fulfill the promise and nothing else mattered anymore. The mortals were selfish and lazy, but he knew they could not go against their nature, no more than a fish could walketh upon the firmament. The mortals needed the guidance of a God; this much was clear to Fou-Lu – until a malefic Hex fell upon him.

When he neared Chedo, a purple haze like a cloud of death descended upon Fou-Lu with the force of a small supernova and he was bound for the floor much like the bloody vomit that erupted from his mouth. Then it hit him, from the sky; something like an acorn or a fallen star. Fou-Lu picked the fallen star from the ground and a manic fit of laughter took him; it was not a fallen star or an acorn – it was Mami's earring. Fou-Lu realized then that the mortals used Mami's love as a nuclear bomb and his uncontrollable laughter belied a wicked epiphany; he understood now that the mortals' depravity was endless; they were monstrous and the only help a God could give them was a swift annihilation.

Fou-Lu survived the Hex, and filled with newfound epiphany, arrived in Chedo like a black hole ready to devour the universe. He laid waste to the guards, who were powerless to stop him, and beheaded the traitorous Emperor Soniel without hesitation in a scene deemed too gory for North American audiences. Fou-Lu took the fallen crown from the Emperor's severed head and placed it upon his own and, in his first act as Emperor, he annihilated the capital city of Chedo. He did not discriminate between man, woman, or child. All mortals were found guilty. Fou-Lu would fulfill the promise the only way he believed possible – mortal liquidation.





ANNIHILATION

"THOU DOST NOT KEN THE POWER OF THAT WHICH YOU WOULD DESTROY. THIS BE A DRAGON." – FOU-LU

Chedo was once the bustling capital of the Fou Empire with a population of roughly one million. The buildings were adorned with jade, but their supports and foundation were built from wood-and-paper and thus highly combustible. Chedo was one of the Fou Empire's largest ports, home to a massive concentration of wooden ships used for both trade and warfare. National highways and checkpoints ran through the city and merchants lined every street corner.

Chedo became the perfect kindling for a bonfire of human corpses. When the mystic fire fell upon Chedo, the wooden homes were reduced to ashes and the once carefree children who played in the streets were blackened. Those who managed to escape the initial blast were chased by Fou-Lu's faithful beasts and eaten alive. Next, Fou-Lu would annihilate Astana, and then Pauk, then Sonne. His nuclear Yin would consume the mortal world and only silence would be left behind.

We are finally here. I have been editing this essay for far too long, and it is still overwrought with exposition and cliché, but we have finally arrived to the good stuff.

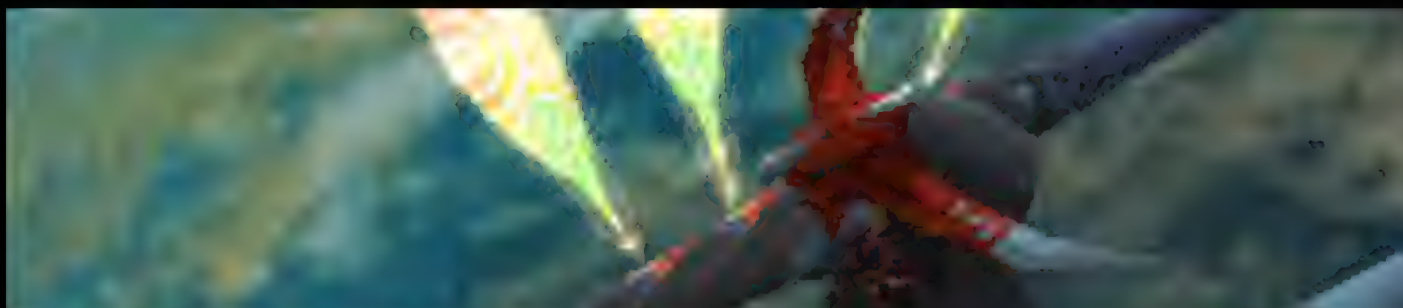
DEAR LOYAL ZERO READERS, ARE YOU READY FOR THE GOOD STUFF?

When I wrote "Chedo" up there - I really meant Japan's port town of Kobe; specifically, Kobe on March 16th and 17th of 1945: The United States firebombing of Kobe during World War II. In fact, most of that first paragraph was plagiarized from Wikipedia only with the city names swapped out.

WHEN JAPAN BOMBED PEARL HARBOR ON DECEMBER 7, 1941, IT WAS THE UNITED STATES' MAMI MOMENT, AND THEIR LOVE AND RAGE AND SORROW BECAME A FIERY RAIN OF DEATH UPON THEIR FOES.

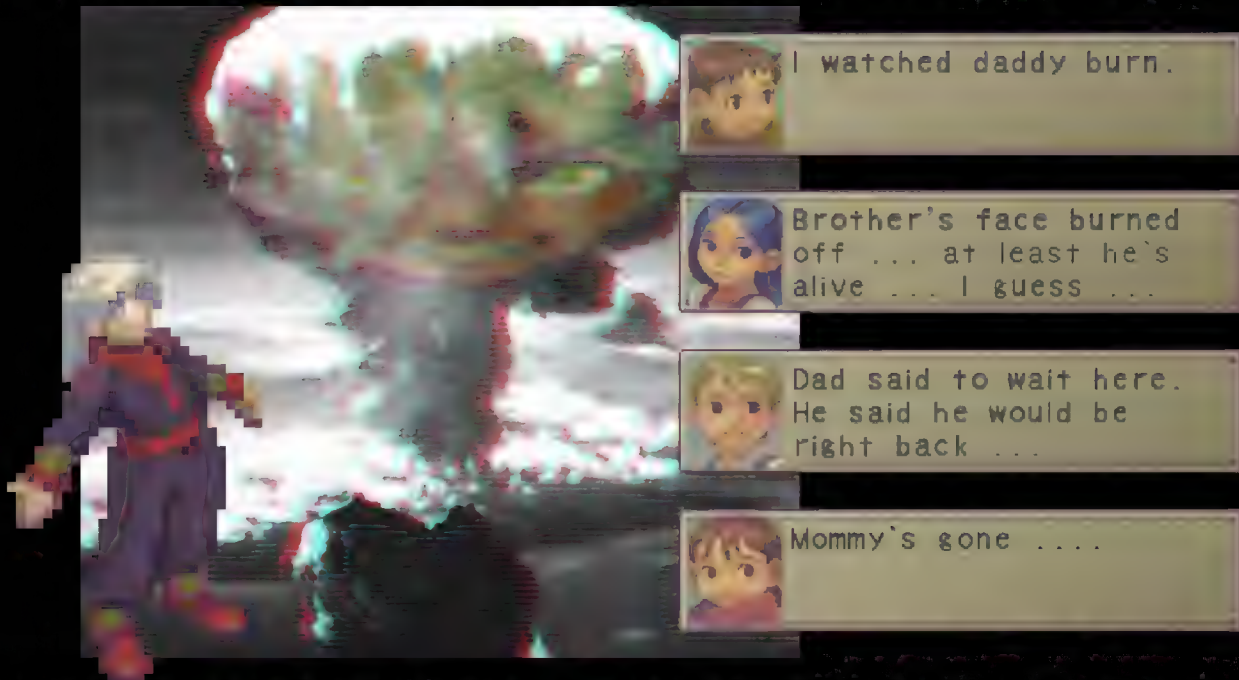
United States' Intel suggested that Kobe's wood-and-paper housing would make the perfect kindling for a reckoning and the immolation of civilians would cause great psychological harm to Japan's collective psyche. Thus, the firebombing of Kobe was a deliberate attack upon Japanese civilians by The United States of America, and over 8,000 people died, and more than 650,000 homes were destroyed. There was a pretense that Kobe was a military town, but the firebombs did not discriminate between man, woman, soldier, civilian, or child.

THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA BECAME THE UNITED STATES OF DON'T MESS WITH US OR WE'LL COMMIT WAR CRIMES ON YOU AND FACE NO CONSEQUENCES.



ANNIHILATION

"THE MORTALS ARE IGNORANT, PRIDEFUL ANIMALS... THEY DO NOT LIE TO ONE ANOTHER... THEIR FOLLY IS IMMEASURABLE." — FOU-LU



During World War II, hundreds of air raids targeting Japanese civilians were carried out by the United States. Many of these air raids were conducted under the command of General Curtis LeMay. Targets were selected based on both military significance and psychological impact to the Japanese people, driven by LeMay's personal philosophy that saw no difference between a civilian and an armed soldier.

"THERE ARE NO INNOCENT CIVILIANS. IT IS THEIR GOVERNMENT, AND YOU ARE FIGHTING A PEOPLE; YOU ARE NOT TRYING TO FIGHT AN ARMED FORCE ANYMORE. SO IT DOESN'T BOTHER ME SO MUCH TO BE KILLING THE SO-CALLED INNOCENT BYSTANDERS."
— GENERAL CURTIS EMERSON LEMAY

To General Curtis LeMay, if Japan were a human body, innocent civilians were part of its nervous system and killing these civilians damaged Japan just as much as killing any soldier. Everyone in Japan was military by proxy. If a child died in an air raid, that was one less future worker; one less future kamikaze pilot; one less future miner to mine the coal that powers the war machine; and most importantly: one less future avenger. LeMay dehumanized his opponent; he saw Japan as a country to be defeated, not a collection of human beings with families and loves and hates and passions just like his own. One has to wonder if this outlook not only protected him cognitively from dissonance but also from a great sorrow – but this would be a generous interpretation of his barbarity.

Humans may be the most intelligent animal on Earth, but – like the city of Astana – this intelligence hides a terrible truth: the vast mental gymnasium of genocidal justifications.

And on March 9th – 10th, 1945, The United States carried out the most devastating air raid in human history: "Operation Meetinghouse," now known as the "Great Tokyo Air Raid."

A fleet of over 300 B-29 bombers swooped Hitchcockian over Tokyo, dropping over 1,500 tons of incendiaries, including half a million cylinders of napalm and white phosphorus which ignited instantly upon contact with oxygen. Idyllic Totoro countryside turned Biblical revelation. And aided by a dry spell and windy weather conditions, the hellfire turned into a firestorm that sucked everything into flame tornadoes. The firestorms razed over 15 square miles of Tokyo, which was largely constructed with wood-and-paper. The inferno did not discriminate between man, woman, and child as it uprooted and burned ancient family trees then scattered their ashes upon the sparking winds. The dead leaves never made it to the ground. Over eighty-thousand human-beings died.

But America's Mami moment was not over yet. In August 1945, they sent their two strongest warriors to the islands of Japan: Little Boy and Fat Man. The United States of America dropped a nuclear bomb on Hiroshima – killing upwards of 120,000 people; three days later, they dropped a second nuclear bomb on Nagasaki – killing an additional 80,000 people.

The lucky ones disintegrated instantly. The unlucky ones found their vision go dark as their forehead-skin melted into their eye sockets and their hair sizzled little holes into their skulls and when they went to scream nothing came out because the melted-skin-putty had already sealed over their mouths. Those who looked into the bright blasts had the color stolen from their eyes leaving nothing but dead-orbs and pain. The fallout left a Hex on the land that produced boils and growths full of cancer and caused babies to be born like a crippled Cerberus flailing in torment before nuclear retrograde took them too. The torture was enough to power an infinite amount of Carronades.

ANNIHILATION

Japan surrendered after the U.S. dropped the second bomb – but at what cost? The common argument is “more people would have died if we didn’t drop the bombs on kids,” but this was a trolley problem with uncertain variables being solved by people who could not possibly know the future. And even so, would more soldiers have died if the war raged on – or more civilians? If it’s a numbers game to these people then consider this: in World War II, 12,100 American civilians died, while upwards to 800,000 Japanese civilians died. This was not a proportional response.

Soldiers signed up for the job and knew what they were getting into, but children are born tabula rasa into a country not of their choosing. Which ethical framework do we have to conjure to justify killing those who are not fighting against us? It seems Curtis LeMay already solved this ethical dilemma, but if someone killed my wife, does that then provide justification to kill that person, their children, and the rest of their family? On a micro-level, this solves nothing and lands me in prison for life; on a macro-level, it’s genocide, and there are seemingly no repercussions as long as you are aligned with the world’s leading superpower.

And the worst part is – it’s still happening. We don’t seem to learn from history, instead: we come up with better excuses for repeating it. Excuses like, “those kids live in a terrorist country so I don’t care if they get burned alive.”

There are wars going on right now that beget great cycles of violence. Innocent people are bombed for acts carried out by governments or terrorists within their borders. These innocent people are killed either for psychological or strategic effect, and there are those who defend these killings for vengeance, claimed-necessity, or otherwise. Some even assert their respect for the lives of children in peaceful nations but withhold their respect for children in terrorist-aligned nations while defining terrorism by their own terms; these terms usually include “if you kill innocent people, you are a terrorist” while ignoring the innocent people killed in the pursuit of defeating these innocent-people-killing terrorists. And when these double standards are called out, they resort to playing the adult-baby version of “well they attacked us first” which devolves into a game of historical one-upmanship that could be argued into pre-homosapien missing-link levels of retroactive blame games, also known as: incredibly fucking stupid.



If I’m born in a country that you have deemed “evil” or “terrorist” – is my life forfeit? And if the answer is yes – why? Is it because this is the unfortunate reality of war; that bystanders will be caught in the crossfire and this is necessary to eliminate “the bad guys?” Or rather, are we killing potential avengers? And if so – isn’t the act of killing anyone creating more potential avengers? And if so, when does it stop – is the logic such that we kill everyone regardless of association because six-degrees-of-separation leads to six-degrees-of-avenger?

Holy wars rage on to this day without a resolution in sight. Some say the solution is bombing the opponent into oblivion – mother and child be damned. But the holy wars persist. What has the slaughter of innocent people achieved other than fueling the holy war? Why do the back and forth bombings persist? Do we even know who cast the first stone – does it even matter? What’s the goal?

Meanwhile, angry people in powerful positions pretend to solve trolley problems with very uncertain variables, and individuals like Curtis LeMay use word-games to deflect criticism and deem those making the criticism as leftist-hippie-scum; even going as far to say that those leftist-hippie-scum are just as bad as the enemy.

Killing children is not a partisan issue. It doesn’t matter if you’re killing kids in your basement or if you’re bombing them from miles away. The child could have just been birthed from the womb of a full-blown terrorist; it doesn’t matter who the child’s parents are, where they were born, what they look like, or anything else you might be able to come up with.

LET THIS BE A WARNING: IF YOU FIND YOURSELF ON THE SIDE OF DEAD BABIES – REACH DEEP INSIDE YOURSELF AND FEEL AROUND FOR THE HEART; YOU MIGHT NOTICE IT MISSING, BUT THERE MAY STILL BE TIME TO FIND IT.

NUCLEAR YINYANG

"I SEETH NOW FOR THE FIRST TIME THROUGH THY EYES.
THE MORTALS ARE INDEED WEAK... FOOLISH... VERILY, A
COLLECTION OF CONTRADICTIONS... AND YET..." - FOU-LU

In Chinese philosophy, Yin and Yang represent the dualistic nature of existence. These two forces are interconnected and complementary, and one cannot exist on its own without the presence of the other. Within Yin, there should always be Yang; and within Yang, there should always be Yin; thus representing the interconnectedness and interdependence of all things. The Yinyang symbol itself is of rotational and inverted symmetry; it can be flipped and still look the same without consideration to its contrasting colors.

When Ryu reached the ruins of Chedo and confronted Fou-Lu in his castle, they were Yin and Yang, and both had come to different conclusions about the world and the mortals who existed within it.

Fou-Lu embodied Yin: darkness, cold, quiet, and passivity. When Fou-Lu awoke from his slumber, he found that his people had forgotten the promise; they warred and killed each other for sport. And just when Fou-Lu started to understand the mortals, they stole his love and turned her into a nuclear bomb against him. Fou-Lu was driven mad by the realization that mortals were ignorant, prideful, esurient animals that caused untold suffering on each other; he had wasted so much time trying to tame them. Allowing mortals to exist would only facilitate the perpetuation of suffering. The solution was simple: kill them all.

Ryu embodied Yang: lightness, warmth, noise, and activity. When Ryu awoke naked and cold he was greeted by smiling mortals and, although they were capable of extreme cruelty, he saw the goodness in their hearts. Even when he came across an orphanage filled with children who were victims of the Hex, or witnessed Princess Elina transformed into a tortured immortal to power the Carronade; he saw these incidents as the actions of a small group of corrupt people, which did not reflect all mortals. Ryu observed misguided mortals exploiting powers they should never have possessed in the first place. Ryu remained tabula rasa - he did not know how to solve the problem.

Fou-Lu held out his hand and spoke to Ryu. He told Ryu of the men who forged philosophies of war that turned children into soldiers. He told Ryu of the Princess turned pandemonium. He told Ryu of the sycophantic babblings of those who justified the murder of civilians based on labels alone. He told Ryu of the Hex. He told Ryu of Mami. He told Ryu that the mortals were unfit for their favor and must perish.

And for the first time in the game, Ryu was no longer mute. Tabula rasa no more. Ryu - you - have to make a decision.

Select "Maybe so..." and your love turns into a nuclear bomb. Atomic fury is unleashed upon the world. The cartographers' Dragons have arrived and the mortals are no more, and maybe some would call this "peace."

You may be asking, "what about the other option? What if I don't want to kill the mortals? What if Ryu is right?"

You have to play Breath of Fire IV to find out.

MAYBE SO...

written by: forrest

What do these
things have in
common?



They're all ...

MASTODON

but only
one is
federated.

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ODE TO THE PS1



#1: FORREST - FINAL FANTASY - IN-STORE CREDIT - CRIME

The PlayStation wasn't my first console, but it was the console that impacted me most during my formative years. I was introduced to the PlayStation at a friend's house; I would watch him play Final Fantasy 8 and Nobuo Uematsu's prog-rock-inspired soundtrack entranced me. I would say to my friend: "let's go to your house and play the music game!" and he would look at me with a raised eyebrow, "what music game?" His frequent reluctance meant that I needed my own Final Fantasy, which meant I needed my own PlayStation. So, like any spoiled preteen suburbanite, I begged my mother to buy me one. After incessant whining, she caved, and I got my very own PlayStation. The store we purchased it from did not have Final Fantasy, so my first games were Mega Man 8 and Ape Escape. I couldn't play Ape Escape because I was missing the DualShock controller needed for the ape-capturing inputs; something that, if it was labeled on the box, was ignored by my attention-deficit brain.

I still longed for Final Fantasy, but mom told me I had to wait until Christmas - and this time frame was unacceptable to an impatient brat such as myself.

Summer came around and I decided to do some crime on a whim for love - love of Final Fantasy. My friend's girlfriend lent me her Game Boy Camera to "play with for the week," and I immediately traded it at the local Babbages for in-store credit. Final Fantasy 8 wasn't in stock, but a spiky-haired bishonen holding a humongous sword drew my attention, and thanks to that in-store credit: I purchased a used copy of that spiky-haired bishonen. Throughout that summer, I spent countless nights playing Final Fantasy 7, and looking back now: this shaped my gaming preferences - nay, all my aesthetic preferences.

After a series of neighborhood dramas, my grandma and I had to return to that same Babbages, repurchase the Game Boy Camera, and return it to its rightful owner. I got to keep Final Fantasy 7, so it all worked out - I guess. Looking back, the whole preteen-confidence-trick thing was a nasty idea and I'm lucky the girl's parents didn't press charges. I wasn't the nicest kid in the world, and I didn't particularly like the girl who lent me the Game Boy Camera to begin with - but that's no excuse.

MY ONLY EXCUSE IS THAT I WAS IN LOVE WITH FINAL FANTASY AND
THIS LOVE DROVE ME TO LARCENY.

written by: forrest

ODE TO THE PS1

#2: TALIBAN BOMBS & THE CASE FOR EMULATION

written by: DigiVoyager

My hometown, Nowshera, is a very poor city in the Northwest of Pakistan, a city so underdeveloped it is more fitting to call it a village, where game consoles are a rarity; the only PS2s were found in an arcade, complete with multi-tap and its only purpose was to play Tekken Tag. This nation has always been Tekken crazy, it's what allowed a makeshift arcade that only housed Tekken Tag, Tekken 4 and Tekken 5 to thrive in a place where games were scoffed at and arcades were considered taboo. In cities it was different, PS2s were common and similarly later on Xbox 360s were the common consoles due to piracy.

The success of the arcades goes back to Tekken 3; a game that from the late 90s to early 2000s was the most popular game here, and you can see that even today; we are still a Tekken crazed nation. In the later days of Tekken 3, computers were becoming more commonplace in every home, and with those came: games, and of course, Tekken 3 was packaged as a PC game and sold for less than \$0.5. It would boot Connectix Game Station, configured with keyboard controls for 2 players. We had a small game store in my town, they sold PlayStation games and a CD that had Connectix as well. Being in no position to afford a PS2 and wanting to play games I always bought PS1 games to play on my humble Pentium 2 PC that couldn't run anything else; so, I was limited to emulated PS1 games - and also GBA games, thank you Visual Boy Advance - and I bought almost every PS1 game that I could. Many games had issues on that emulator - Dino Crisis 2, Resident Evil Director's Cut to name a few - and I ended up Googling them; that is how I wandered down the emulation rabbit hole, learning about ePSXe, PSXFIN and many others, and that is why I am a retro gamer today.

We weren't allowed to go out and play much since that was the decade of the Taliban's retaliatory bombings against our government, so these were dark and miserable times - and poverty packed its own punches - but those pirated PS1 games were my happy place for many years.

At first I mainly played action titles like Dino Crisis 2 and Future Cop L.A.P.D, Warhawk, Colony Wars, Blaster Master, Covert Ops, and Mega Man games; racing games like NFS, Ridge Racer and fighting games like Soul Blade, Tekken 3 and Street Fighter EX. Later, with better internet, I discovered more Japanese titles and ended up playing Yu-Gi-Oh!, Saga Frontier, Breath of Fire, Vandal Hearts, Vanguard Bandits, Lunar and one of my favorites: Ogre Battle. I also found some cool fighting games like Rival Schools. I later discovered fan translations after finding a Tales of Phantasia translation on a certain emulation website I would use which led me down the rabbit hole of untranslated games. To this day I try to play as many games as I can; most recently it was Brightis made by the developer Quintet of Terranigma fame.

Without the PlayStation's catalogue of incredible games, there wouldn't be the market or the emulators which got me into retro gaming. Even today, I find amazing titles on PS1 that blow my mind, largely thanks to fan translations shared via emulators. Games like Aconcagua, Germs: The Targeted City, Linda Again, various Goemon games, and Blue: Legend of Water; all only recently translated.

Emulators helped a poor little boy in a forgotten corner of the world experience worlds he never imagined and added some much needed happiness to his day.





PART 1

The first time I ever played PlayStation was at a friend of my parents' house. It was one of my Dad's friends and his wife, but the whole family got to know him, and he was a great guy. He had owned a PS1, and on a visit one day, he let me play it. I had been gaming for a while at this point; I had a Nintendo, had played the SNES, owned a Gameboy, Sega, Computer, and played an N64. The PlayStation was different.

I looked through his games, and I didn't find anything I liked, except one thing that seemed interesting. It looked like a game with a bunch of games in it, like 10 in one or something. I was half right. It was my first experience with a "Demo" disk before, so I didn't know any better. Specifically, it was the "PlayStation Picks" demo disk that was released at launch.

I put it in and started it up. The first game I saw and played was ESPN Xtreme Games. I fell in love with that game. I played the heck out of it. I had played racing games before, but nothing like this. I was racing on boards, skates, and bikes, getting points, kicking people, and going through checkpoints to get a better score. This was nothing like any game I had played yet at the time. I remember having so much fun. Not, "I have to get a higher score, I have to unlock stuff, I have to win", just...fun.

I couldn't tell you what other games were on that disk except one other. Jumping Flash. If Xtreme games was fun, Jumping Flash blew me away. I had already played Super Mario 64 and Pilotwings 64; this was entirely different. I remember getting power-ups, jumping on enemies, and platforming in the sky to get all the points. I would go to the highest point in the demo, with the power-up, and do a super jump to try and go as high as I could, then just fall to the ground, and go do it again. And when the timer hit 0 and the demo ended, I just did it again. It felt like freedom. I don't know why that did more than SM64, but it just did.

Those two games stuck out in my mind more than any other games I had ever had "firsts" with. I am probably wearing rose-colored glasses; I admit that. The first time you do anything new is always gonna be special, but it stuck with me for years, and I would go back to those demos again and again, even after getting the games.

PART 2

You may be asking, how can you have a second "first" experience? Well, my "first" first experience was when I played the console for the first time; my "second" first experience was when I owned the console.

I remember getting it for my birthday. Cliche, yeah, but when does the average kid get a new console besides birthdays and holidays?

My mom actually took me out and let me pick what two games I wanted. Did I get Twisted Metal? Resident Evil? Crash Bandicoot? Nope. None of them. ESPN Xtreme Games? Jumping Flash? Later on, I did. No, I got Jet Moto.

Just like the others, I played it on a demo disc, and it was FUN. It was racing unleashed. I was not stuck to a track, just an overall direction. I go this way, in any way I can, taking any path I want. I am racing on an abandoned highway on and off the water; I am on a snow-covered mountain, and I am in a swamp. It was fun, and it was my first type of game I experienced 3D SPEED. It was something else. Later on, I read that it was well received, but criticized for its difficulty. I never saw an issue, personally.

The biggest aspect of both of my "firsts" was my experience playing games that emulated a sense of freedom, that were, for lack of a better word, non-linear, and different enough from the usual stuff that Nintendo put out to take notice. I was not tied down to a specific path; I had to go "that" direction, or to "that" point, but I could do it any way I wanted. It was incredible.

Playing games now, you don't truly realize what it meant to experience that. You can see an understandable path from games in 2006 to 2013, and to 2020, like going from A to B to C. But for my generation, going from SNES/Sega to PS1/N64, that was a hell of a jump. They pushed the limits back then. It was like Going from A to D. And I am thankful I got to experience that.



I'll be here...



I can't remember the exact year I was gifted my PlayStation, but of course I can remember the feeling. Something unique about its rough edges and the two big round buttons for POWER and EJECT - how I smacked each one a bit too hard due to the springy sound that came along with it. And of course those ethereal Sony Computer Entertainment and PSX logo startup sounds - rattling somewhere in my ADHD-adled adult brain still, I can hear it every once and a while when I'm bored enough.

For titles, there were my early days of the clunky Twisted Metal, a bouncy Rayman, and then Crash Bandicoot's hijinks - feeling like you were running forward with the bastardized marsupial.

A few RPGs rented from the local video store nearby, but nothing to write home about... until...

A blind buy, the jewel case gleaming under fluorescent store lights - the one with the three characters facing away from each other on the bottom, but the embracing almost yin-and-yang of a man and woman in the middle, illustrated by Yoshitaka Amano in his small yet full splendor.

Its hard to recall exactly what drew me to that game in particular - probably the pre-teen simplicity of [gaze at front cover] "looks cool" [flip to back cover] "still looks cool", maybe the enticing fullness of the thing - "... what, four discs?!? That's a lot of game!"

When I got home and tore off the plastic wrap around my copy Final Fantasy VIII, inserted the first disc, selected "New Game", the opening opera flooded my sensory nervous system. Waves rushing in against some distant shoreline, promises spoken by someone all the way from a cracked desert wasteland to a lush rolling field. Determined and vengeful expressions, but also looks of love - The Falling Sword and the Feather.

After Nobuo Uematsu's masterpiece composition came to its conclusion and the title faded against the screen, staring mouth agape, I reached for the smaller reset button just to watch it all over again before starting to play.

I'll be waiting...for you...so...

written by: Rooney

A closed-off nihilistic-seeming protagonist - student at Balamb Garden (School For Teenage Soldiers!), working his way towards become a member of the infamous SeeD force, who are dispatched on missions on behalf of the Garden's upper-echelon. Shortly after his initial acceptance into SeeD, Squall is ordered to lead a team in a handful of missions, the second of which he is sent to link up with a resistance group in a particularly small town close to full-blown occupation by an outside force. It is within this mission where he meets Rinoa, where a love begins to blossom.

And along the way, through the same path as that great romance, we get:

- Teenage mercenaries-for-hire being trained by different "schools" possibly bent on global domination
- The greatest card-based RPG mini-game
- "The ugliest train I have ever seen"
- A cute dog being used as a projectile weapon, and even some sort of healing canine god
- Industrial sabotage
- Space Romance
- Space Witchcraft
- The Compression of Time???
- Amor Fati
- Hot Dogs

What must be made perfectly clear is this game would not be as thrilling and impactful without two things the Playstation console brought to life like I had never seen before in a video game:

1. Pre-rendering capabilities
2. Crisp 16-bit audio

The gray little box (it was quite portable for its time, I would argue) could really pull a lot of punches, and the developers at Squaresoft really made VIII shine. Motion Capture scenes in high definition video was shocked to see after VII's more caricature aesthetic. All of the ocean-side towns like Balamb and Dollet had this distinctive feel to it - somewhere to call "home". Then as you ventured further away from your habitual stomping grounds, you would be completely encompassed by places like Esthar. Every single piece of these places like a cinematic dwelling place, the graphics so eloquently crafted at an expensive development workstation. These backgrounds and illustrations still stand as a huge testament to the system and the people who poured their hearts out into making games for it.

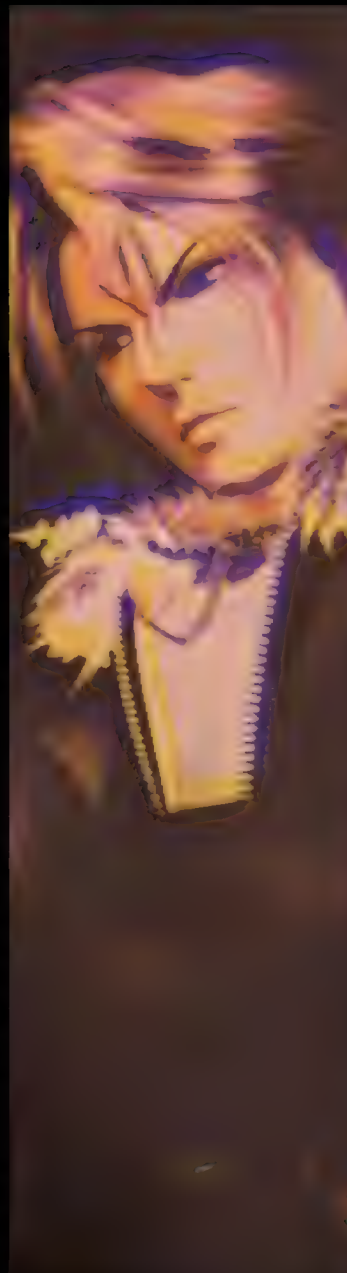
It was a console that could truly display the shadows, lighting, and contrast that made so many of these places jump out at you. All on these four compact discs, in their quickly cracked case, each finding themselves seated for hours upon hours into my Playstation - its whirring and clicking internals sounding through restless nights.

All of this was surrounded by such a wonderful soundtrack (I would argue it is Uematsu's best), which elevates just about every moment in the game. The music pairs so well with its respective locations - there is a reason I lingered so long to chill in places like Balamb, explored Esthar through and through during all the honks and bleeps, and felt an immediate ominous sense that I should re-look through my Junctions and other configurations upon entering Ultimecia Castle. I think its one of the more unsung jumps in progression from something like FFXVII, taking the sound capabilities of the Playstation to a next level.

When someone mentions the original gray Sony console, FFXVIII is seated at the top of those memories.

The Nature of Time and the only slightly unraveled mystery of Ultimecia - these were things that had me convincing my parents to bring that beloved PSX - with its controllers and components cable - along with us on a family vacation to Florida, where instead of wanting to see Disney World I wanted to ride the Ragnarok and increase my controller skills with my party's Limit Breaks.

With some of the horrible ports of VIII to modern mainstream systems (the original Steam port, which was a PC clone with dulled MIDI versions of the soundtrack, and the "Remaster", which I consider a foolish half-hearted attenuation instead of a real improvement of something very unique), I am much more eager to grab either my original Playstation Discs or an .ISO/ROM directly backed up from one of them to re-play. Now if only someone could transport me into the past in a dreamlike state, so that I can remember where I stored my Memory Card...



Jake's Animated TV Blog



all your childhood
friends are here

animatedtvblog.wordpress.com

ARTIFICIAL SWEETENERS SARCASM AND CYNICISM

"When we were children, being unknowingly taken advantage of by corporate goons was fun; as adults, it's just another boring day in Townsville."

written by: forrest

As I write this piece on The Powerpuff Girls: Bad Mojo Jojo for the Game Boy Color, I am completely shitfaced and drunk and stoned and very deep into adulthood; at this moment, I am the exact opposite demographic from the one that the developers at Sennari Interactive intended for this game; that demographic being: kids who begged their parents to take them to Toys "R" Us after school to buy some Crazy Bones and happened to wander into the computer games aisle only to find their favorite Cartoon Network cartoon wrapped in Game Boy Color packaging with a \$50 price tag stamped on it - in 2000.

Yes, Game Boy Color games cost \$50, even in the year 2000. I remember. I was there. I was that kid.

The bottom line is this: if Cartoon Network executives knew that a drunk man in his thirties would be writing a piece containing the words "shitfaced," "drunk," or "stoned" for their beloved The Powerpuff Girls: Bad Mojo Jojo and releasing that piece in a highly esteemed computer games magazine, those executives would be sending their goon squad to that man's office to cut off his fingers, thereby ensuring that he never puts digital pen to paper again. And I imagine that goon squad would look very much like villains from The Powerpuff Girls.

The Rowdyruff Boys could be descending upon my location at this very moment.

It's well known that the 2000s Cartoon Network-branded Game Boy Color games are merely palette swaps with different intellectual property names slapped-on, but The Powerpuff Girls: Bad Mojo Jojo has a unique twist: it's the first in the mythical The Powerpuff Girls Game Boy Color Trilogy; the other two games being: The Powerpuff Girls: Paint the Townsville Green and The Powerpuff Girls: Battle HIM. Each game allows you to play as one of three prepubescent Chemical-Xers: Blossom, Buttercup, or Bubbles; and has you fighting a different group of villains in each title.

Cartoon Network executives clearly wanted to capitalize on mom's hard-earned-waitressing-money by coming up with diabolical ways to get children to buy the same game three times. When we were children, being unknowingly taken advantage of by corporate goons was fun; as adults, it's just another boring day in Townsville. I guess we can blame Pokémon for the Mephistophelian trend of let's-release-the-same-game-with-minor-differences-as-an-entirely-separate-game-at-full-price-and-incentivize-children-to-buy-them-through-playground-shame-and-ridicule.



ARTIFICIAL SWEETENERS SARCASM AND CYNICISM

"BACK THEN YOU GOT A NEW GAME ONCE IN A BLUE MOON AND YOU SAVORED EVERY MOMENT WITH THOSE BLUE-MOON-GAMES."



The Powerpuff Girls was created by cartoonist Craig Douglas McCracken in 1998; he also helped direct Dexter's Laboratory, which released around the same time and had a strikingly similar artistic style, albeit Dexter's Laboratory was created by the legendary Genndy Tartakovsky, known for creating the Samurai Jack and Star Wars: Clone Wars cartoons. Don't get these cartoonists confused; one created the greatest thing in the Star Wars extended universe, and another created a cartoon featuring a very irresponsible father who uses his three genetically engineered children for casual vigilantism.

That's not a crack on Craig - I am getting wasted and writing about someone else's creations for a zero-reader computer games magazine while he's had more success doing what he loves than I could ever dream of.

While The Powerpuff Girls was never one of my favorite cartoons as a kid, the significance of one of the villains spitting blood whilst being kicked in the mouth by Buttercup during the opening was not lost on me; being one of the few times blood was shown in a children's show - and that's special because this violence inspired me to become that 2000s Toys "R" Us kid who begged his grandma to buy the The Powerpuff Girls: Bad Mojo Jojo during one fateful 2000s summer. My friend also had the game and I wanted to battle him because we both knew all three games had link-cable-functionality but we soon found out that the link-cable-functionality was only for trading collectibles found in the game's levels and the collectibles were nothing more than blurry pixel art and we were sorely disappointed but we played and beat our respective versions regardless because back then you got a new game once in a blue moon and you savored every moment with those blue-moon-games because they were all you had until the next cerulean satellite.



I asked that same friend if he remembered playing The Powerpuff Girls on Game Boy Color with me during that warm 2000s Charleston summer and he stared at me with a dumbfounded look on his face, indicating that this stuff is far more important to me than it is to him. And that's probably a bad thing for me; a sign that I shouldn't be waxing nostalgic on childhood frivolities so often; perhaps my brain power could be put to better use than writing over 1000 words on games that no one has thought about in over two decades and that are clearly targeted toward children?

No - it is he who is wrong, not I.

But I have been waxing far too long; you're here for the riveting gameplay review, of course - so it's time to start the waning.



ARTIFICIAL SWEETENERS SARCASM AND CYNICISM

The Powerpuff Girls: Bad Mojo Jojo and its two sisters are side-scrolling beat-em-ups with controls as slippery as four glasses of wine at a dive bar after getting into a big fight with your girlfriend; all you can do is punch, kick, and fire some special-liquid-attack provided you have enough Chemical X in your bloodstream. There is no jump button, but holding up on the directional pad makes your character fly for a brief period, which never feels quite right. The levels range from The Professor's Laboratory to Townsville Rooftops to Pokey Oaks School Playground to The Mouth of a Volcano and they all contain a non-zero-number of barely-hidden collectibles meant to be traded with friends using the link-cable-functionality. The enemies are mostly big dudes in prison jumpers with large muscles and guns; attacking said prison people is a combination of very-specific-angles and luck and always-taking-damage because you got too close to the enemy in the process of attacking. The bosses are just more-dangerous versions of prison dudes and there is no real strategy involved in anything and it's about as entertaining as playing tic-tac-toe with a six-year-old who cheats.



The Powerpuff Girls Trilogy is an uninspired cash-grab meant to encourage kids to trade in-game collectibles with their friends or - for those with no friends - buy all three versions and trade the collectibles with themselves in what amounts to the ultimate foreshadowing to lifelong depression; of course, kids never did either of these things because the collectibles are lame and the games are just not enough fun to trigger latent obsessive compulsive disorder.

IN SHORT: CARTOON NETWORK TRIED TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF CHILDREN BY TRICKING THEM INTO BUYING THEIR INSIPID SHOVELWARE CASH-GRAB GAMES JUST LIKE PROFESSOR UTONIUM TOOK ADVANTAGE OF HIS THREE GENETICALLY ENGINEERED DAUGHTERS TO FIGHT CRIME IN TOWNSVILLE.



Except, Cartoon Network failed. The Powerpuff Girls Trilogy bombed commercially upon release and some Cartoon Network executive somewhere probably got fired for pitching the idea.

Instead of Sugar, Spice, and Everything Nice; The Powerpuff Girls trilogy is Exploitation, Corporatism, and Everything Wrong With the Licensed Games Industry. And, as a result, I am full of artificial sweeteners, sarcasm, and lots and lots of cynicism - thanks Cartoon Network.



THE RITUAL OF THE HUNT

"THEY'RE STILL LIVIN' ANIMALS AND WE DON'T WANT 'EM SUFFERIN' TOO BAD."



The deer had to be grazing only 15 yards away from me for I could see the tranquility in its eyes. It was a doe; no antlers. With silence and slow, I lifted the butt of Dad's ancient lever-action rifle to my jawline and held breath while my index finger crept around the grip of the wood and quietly inched toward the trigger guard; trembling. I winked my left eye shut as my right focused into scope, and I could see the beast's tranquility even clearer now. It wasn't grazing; it was standing, perusing nature, and it bat lashes as it slowly lowered its slender head toward a solitary leaf on a sapling; nipping it most delicately off the hardwood. The scope revealed the doe's spiky velvet, an uncommon trait; perfect for my induction ceremony. Dad would be very proud.

I first learned of Counter-Strike within the pages of a PC gaming magazine in Autumn Y2K; it was depicted as a realistic first-person shooter with a focus on multiplayer and teamwork. And although derived from Valve's Half-Life, it lacked the science fiction aspects that attracted the taped-glasses demographic and appealed more to my audience: southern boys who dreamed of monster trucks and machine guns and mounted deer heads. I wanted Counter-Strike more than anything; especially after my friends at school started playing, but my Dad didn't see the appeal and wanted me to focus on the three G's: girls, grades, and guns – and football. But we made a compromise: if I made all B's in school that year, he would buy me a Dell PC and a copy of Counter-Strike. Needless to say, I studied real hard, and I got those B's.

As I watched the doe chew leaves from the hardwood, I thought about what Dad told me years ago: "the best way to kill a deer is to shoot 'em while they're standin' with one side of their body facin' ya; that way, ya aim true an' make every shot count. Ya gotta be quick but silent an' steady as a rock; that's the key to bringin' home the bag, son." He would say while chewing tobacco as naturally as the doe chewed leaves, "this 'ere is called a broadside shot an' it's the quickest way to kill a deer, son – ya know, they're still livin' animals and we don't want 'em sufferin' too bad."

Counter-Strike is a simple premise wrapped in layers of deep first-person-shooter mechanics; two sides – terrorists and counter-terrorists – firefight across everyday terrain with objectives such as bomb defusal and hostage rescue. The game oozes realism, as each gun is derived from a real world model and handles as one would expect; holding down left-click to rapid-fire – or 'spraying' – decreases your accuracy, while firing in short bursts – or 'tapping' – keeps your aim steady; holding the ctrl-key to crouch increases precision even further which mirrors the real world firing technique of kneeling with your rear knee placed on the ground and your other leg supporting the elbow of your forward arm. All weapons benefit from these precision mechanics, but the AWP benefits most; the AWP is a sniper rifle that kills in one shot – the drawback being that it requires a reload after being fired.

When I used the AWP – which was always – I pictured my opponent as deer and recalled what Dad told me about the broadside shot, and this advice carried me to Counter-Strike stardom. I became so proficient with the AWP that my friends called me "The AWP King" and I joined local tournaments full of confidence and verve.

Mesmerized – I continued to peer through the looking glass. The doe basked in stray beams piercing the canopy layer, only breaking posture to pluck leaves off the hardwood. My thoughts veered to the ancient rifle that trembled lightly in my hands, passed down from grandfather to father to son in The Ritual of the Hunt. I wondered to myself; did Dad tremble too? Did he hesitate before shooting his first deer? Why was I hesitating at all? To stop the trembling I took a note from Counter-Strike and held the ctrl-key to crouch; my right knee crunched into dry leaves as my left supported my forward arm while I readjusted the ancient rifle. I winked and peered through the looking glass once more, but this time the doe's magnified eyes were staring back at me.

written by: smote reverser



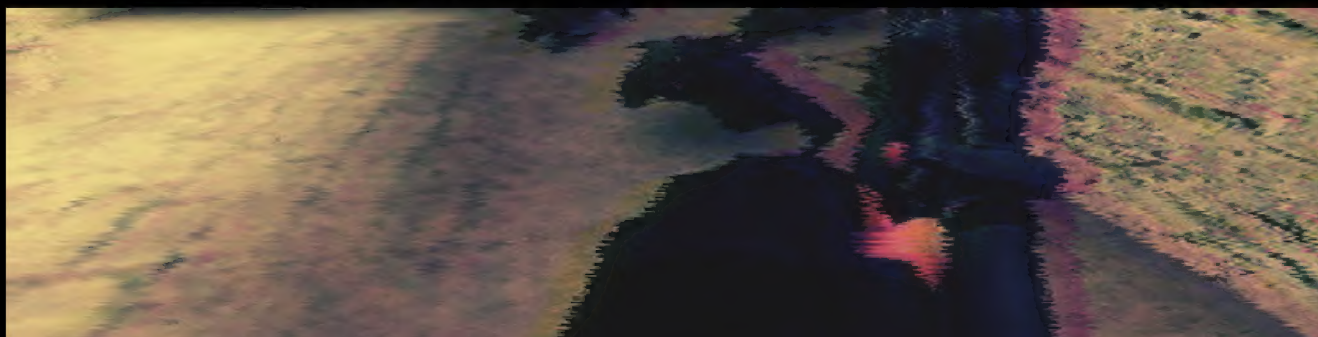
"LIKE A WICKED PACK OF HYENAS GYRED AROUND A HUMAN BABY."

For our first local tournament, we faced a team composed of kids from our middle school. The winners of the tournament would win brand new gaming PCs. It was hosted at a local LAN Gaming Center called the Arena; a dark warehouse overflowing with computers jam-packed with the most popular computer games of 2001. The ambiance was shadow and fluorescent, like that of a jellyfish in the darkest recesses of the oceans. The Arena was the natural habitat of stoners, outcasts, and those who played Everquest and Doom; a place where both hardcore nerds and potential school shooters mingled freely as there was a surprising amount of overlap in their interests. My team pushed through this unholy union and started discussing strategies for the upcoming digital gunfights when the opposing team walked in; their leader was wheelchair-bound with thick glasses, greasy hair, and a band-tee for a group I had never heard of. My teammate Ryan – an older boy who had been held back several grades and expelled for attacking other students at least twice – pointed at the kid in the wheelchair and called him the f-slur of the homosexual variety and we laughed like a wicked pack of hyenas gyred around a human baby. An Arena employee heard this slur-slinging and gave us a warning, but we shrugged it off because we talked like this all the time – it made us feel superior when someone got offended.



The tournament was not going well. The other team seemed to read our minds; we would go B and they would go A; we would go A and they would go B; we would try to camp at spawn but they would flashbang us into confusion and clean up in the aftermath; we would try to rush early but they would anticipate this and trap us in a pincer formation. And to top it off, the disabled boy was far more skilled with the AWP than I – his trigger finger was always seconds faster than mine. We lost the tournament and we were embarrassed, but we masked this embarrassment with the foulest language possible. We slung slurs like bullets at a drunken bar fight in a Wild West saloon.

The slur-slinging culminated in whirlwind-heat-and-flash as Ryan stood up and accused the disabled boy of cheating. I turned to face the altercation, but before I could do anything, Ryan grabbed the disabled boy by his long hair and was screaming slurs at him. Ryan then pulled the disabled boy's hair with such force that it tornadoed him onto the floor and left a clump of bloody mess in Ryan's clenched fist. He then started kicking the disabled boy in the gut, "this is what you get for cheating, you gimp fa—!" he shouted on repeat.



Horried, I leapt in and grabbed Ryan from behind, but he was much stronger than myself and pushed me to the floor. Four Arena employees then jumped in and dragged Ryan off the disabled boy, who was moaning meekly between invocations of "mom" gurgled in spittle and hemoglobin.

The police were called, and an ambulance showed up just as the disabled boy's mom arrived to pick up her mangled son. There was an exodus as the boy was wheeled out on a stretcher, mumbling incoherently. I watched as the mom hurried to her son's side with tears swelling in her eyes. She turned to Ryan, who was being escorted by two police officers, and instead of screaming obscenities at him, she started to sob uncontrollably. I knew then that, even though Ryan had attacked the boy, I was just as much at fault as he was. I couldn't articulate it at the time, but I had dehumanized that boy into a stretcher.



The doe was unmoving, as if stunned by the glare of an ancient violence. I lifted my vision to catch a glimpse of her beyond the glass, but there was no illusion; she stared in confusion, as if asking a single question - "why?" I shifted my vision to the glass once more, expanding her forehead into a perfect target just when two small fawns emerged from the nearby brush. The fawns obscured my view as they nuzzled into their mother, but the doe remained resolute in her questioning. The fawns, noticing their mother's focus, turned to me, and then they too stood resolute - questioning my ancient violence.

I thought to myself: "Three heads to hang on the wall. Dad would be proud." But as I looked into the eyes of the fawn, I remembered the boy at the Arena. And as I looked at the doe, I remembered the mother sobbing. I remembered the violence, and just as I remembered this ancient violence, the fawns nuzzled their mother's velvet head and she nuzzled back, and then they turned with a skip and trotted slowly into the wood, as if there was nothing to be afraid of - as if I was one with nature itself.

My finger eased off the ancient trigger of the ancient rifle, and I slung the ancient violence over my shoulder as I walked back to camp.



written by: smote reverser

I AM WRITING THIS AT THE END OF THE WORLD - YOU MADE IT. NOT ONLY THE END OF THE MAGAZINE, BUT THE END OF A FULL WEEK OFF FROM WORK IN WHICH I SAT DOWN AT MY DESK, IGNORED ALL FAMILY, AND HAMMERED OUT THREE (MAYBE FOUR?) ARTICLES FOR THIS PASSION PROJECT. HERE IS THE END OF ALL OF IT. I AM PLEASED WITH THE ARTICLES I HAVE WRITTEN FOR THIS PUBLICATION AS IT FORCED ME TO ADAPT INTO SHORT-FORM WRITING, WHICH WAS A WEAK POINT OF MINE, AS ANY READER OF ONCOMPUTER.GAMES KNOWS (NONE). IRONICALLY, THE SHORT-FORM ARTICLES ARE MORE FUN TO READ THAN THE MAIN SPECTACLE: THE BREATH OF FIRE IV ESSAY, AND HAVE OPENED MY EYES A BIT REGARDING HOW I WANT TO PROCEED WITH ONCOMPUTER.GAMES. I WILL LIKELY PUBLISH EACH ARTICLE ON THE ONCOMPUTER.GAMES WEBSITE AND STICK WITH MORE SHORT-FORM CONTENT GOING FORWARD. HONESTLY, I DON'T KNOW HOW TO END THIS MAGAZINE, WHICH IS WHY I AM STILL WRITING THIS RUN-ON PARAGRAPH, AND I GUESS NOW IS THE TIME TO COVER MY ASS: THE SCREENSHOTS IN THIS MAGAZINE WERE TAKEN BY MYSELF (FORREST) FOR THE PURPOSES OF THIS MAGAZINE; THE ONLY SCREENSHOTS NOT TAKEN BY ME WERE FOR THE FOLLOWING GAMES: COUNTER-STRIKE, FINAL FANTASY 8, OGRE BATTLE, DINO CRISIS, AND TEKKEN 3; MOST OF THOSE SCREENSHOTS WERE TAKEN FROM MOBYGAMES.COM. PHOTOGRAPHY OF DESKS, TELEVISIONS, ETC., WAS TAKEN BY MYSELF OR BY SAM IN THE CASE OF THE TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 2 ARTICLE. EVERYTHING ELSE WAS EITHER TAKEN FROM RANDOM GOOGLE SEARCHES OR, IN SPECIAL CASES, YOUTUBE VIDEOS - THE POWERPUFF GIRL CARTOON INTRO, FOR EXAMPLE. CONSIDERING THIS PUBLICATION IS A JOURNALISTIC COMMENTARY AND/OR CRITICISM THAT IS ENTIRELY NON-PROFIT AND ADVERTISES NOTHING EXCEPT OTHER NON-PROFIT PASSION PROJECTS, EVERYTHING IN THIS PUBLICATION SHOULD BE WELL WITHIN THE TERMS OF "FAIR USE" COPYRIGHT LAW; COPYRIGHT DISCLAIMER UNDER SECTION 107 OF THE COPYRIGHT ACT 1976, ALLOWANCE IS MADE FOR "FAIR USE" FOR PURPOSES SUCH AS CRITICISM, COMMENT, NEWS REPORTING, TEACHING, SCHOLARSHIP, EDUCATION, AND RESEARCH. FAIR USE IS A USE PERMITTED BY COPYRIGHT STATUTE THAT MIGHT OTHERWISE BE INFRINGING. NON-PROFIT, EDUCATIONAL, OR PERSONAL-USE TIPS THE BALANCE IN FAVOR OF FAIR USE. IF I COULD DRAW, PAINT, OR MAKE MUSIC - BELIEVE ME, I WOULDN'T BE A WRITER. WRITING IS THE EASIEST ART TO PICK UP AND THE HARDEST TO MASTER; IT'S PERFECT FOR ATTENTION-DEFICITS WHO WANT TO BE ARTISTIC BUT CAN'T PUT THE EFFORT INTO LEARNING HOW TO DRAW OR LEARNING AN INSTRUMENT; WRITING MAKES YOU FEEL ACCOMPLISHED FROM THE GET-GO AND, THE MORE YOU WRITE, THE BETTER YOU GET - BUT ALSO, THE MORE YOU HATE YOUR OWN WORK AS IT REMAINS TRUE THAT AS YOU GET BETTER AT SOMETHING, THE WORSE YOU THINK YOU ARE AT THAT SOMETHING. IT'S THE DUNNING-KRUGER PARADOX. I REALLY NEED TO WRITE MORE FOR MY ONPORMUSIC.COM SITE, BUT WRITING ABOUT MUSIC - AND KEEPING IT INTERESTING - IS HARDER THAN WRITING ABOUT COMPUTER GAMES; YOU CAN ONLY DESCRIBE A GUITAR LICK AS "MELODIOUS" SO MANY TIMES BEFORE YOU START VEERING OFF INTO "THE GUITAR SOUNDS LIKE A LIGHTNING STORM AT THREE IN THE MORNING AND A THUNDERBOLT JUST HIT THE TREE OUTSIDE YOUR WINDOW," WHICH, WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT IT - DOESN'T REALLY TELL YOU ANYTHING ABOUT THE GUITAR LICK; IS THE GUITAR GOOD OR BAD IN THAT DESCRIPTION? IT CERTAINLY SOUNDS COOL, BUT IT'S NOT PARTICULARLY INFORMATIVE - DOES IT NEED TO BE? REGARDLESS, I'LL WRITE SOMETHING. I THINK THE NEXT GAME I'M GOING TO PLAY - IN FULL - IS PHANTASY STAR ONLINE AND WRITE SOMETHING ABOUT HOW THE INTERNET IS AMAZING BUT ALSO SUCKS (AGAIN); AND I'LL MAKE THE NEXT MAGAZINE ISSUE SET IN DECEMBER 2000 AND MAKE PHANTASY STAR ONLINE THE MAIN FEATURE AS IT WAS RELEASED THAT YEAR AND MONTH; OR MAYBE I'LL PLAY THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION (FOR THE HUNDREDDTH TIME, BUT IT'S BEEN SINCE 2018, I THINK?), OR MAYBE I'LL PLAY CRYSTALIS; SHIREN THE WANDERER 6 IS BURNING A HOLE IN MY HEAD TOO, BUT I DON'T DO "BACKLOGS" BECAUSE MY GAME-PLAYING HABITS ARE WIST AND WHIMSY, NOT PLANNED - NOTHING IS PLANNED. IF I PLANNED THINGS I WOULD NOT BE WORKING A JOB I HATE IN SOFTWARE-SALES. REMEMBER WHEN YOU WERE YOUNG? YOU SHONE LIKE THE SUN. THE ONLY TRUE FREEDOM IS FREEDOM FROM THE HEART'S DESIRE. EVERYBODY KNOWS WHAT'S GOING WRONG WITH THE WORLD, I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON IN MYSELF. WE REACH OUT AND PRAY TO A DEAF, DUMB, AND BLIND GOD WHO NEVER EXPLAINS. I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT'S GOING WRONG WITH MYSELF. I'M JUST A SLOW EMOTION REPLAY OF SOMEBODY THAT I USED TO THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR READING THIS MAGAZINE. I LOVE YOU. - FORREST, THE EDITOR, THE

The term "computer games" in this context means literally any video game: "computer games" is what grandma says when she tells you to "stop playing those damn computer games and go outside!" And if you are still with us, you have been through a lot of torture and women being tortured by sperm-whale-sized-organ-farmer for almost two thousand years. At this point, you are likely worn out by the imagery for all the body horror and so much more vivid than any writing, and you tell yourself, "this is my help." And that's the problem: take every time you write an essay. I like to write about evil-nasty-weird things to think real. But there's a problem: made: surely, bloated women you will have. During my time, I did a lot of fishing, I did a lot of notes. I wrote an essay anyone else would fire IV. It was interesting. I made connections and over the way, and I would say that I would win an award. Here Be Dragons or: NUCLEAR. Going to be a real page-turner. I started writing, I could write in order, and this mess: writer's block? No - I realized that - I gave Fou-Lu to Ryu and Yang and Tanuki to rival. Without complacency. With nothing worth competing, there's nothing to rival, there's nothing to myself to. Without a rival, I write paragraphs in which every sentence rhymes.



"like ball lightning within the clouds of a